



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, April 3, 2018

Day 10

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Fourth Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP), Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition	Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (UCP)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (NDP)	Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)	Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (NDP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)	Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)	Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP), Government House Leader
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)	McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)	McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (UCP), Official Opposition Whip
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)	McKitrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)	McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (NDP)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP), Alberta Party Opposition House Leader	McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwod (NDP)	Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (NDP)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (NDP)	Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (NDP)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)	Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (NDP), Government Whip	Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UCP), Official Opposition House Leader
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (UCP)	Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP), Premier
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)	Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UCP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)	Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)	Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UCP)	Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (NDP)	Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)	Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (UCP), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP), Deputy Government House Leader	Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (Ind)	Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (NDP)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (NDP)	Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (AP)	Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (NDP), Deputy Government House Leader	Schneider, David A., Little Bow (UCP)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (UCP), Official Opposition Deputy Whip	Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (NDP)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)	Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)	Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)	Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (UCP)	Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (NDP)	Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)	Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (NDP)	Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (UCP)	Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Jansen, Hon. Sandra, Calgary-North West (NDP)	Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (UCP)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)	Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UCP), Leader of the Official Opposition	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Kleinsteuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (NDP)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP), Deputy Government Whip
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (NDP), Deputy Government House Leader	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (NDP)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
	Vacant, Fort McMurray-Conklin
	Vacant, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 25 Alberta Party: 3 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 2

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Clerk	Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and Committee Services	Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of House Services	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Stephanie LeBlanc, Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel		Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Sandra Jansen	Minister of Infrastructure
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

Parliamentary Secretaries

Jessica Littlewood	Economic Development and Trade for Small Business
Annie McKittrick	Education

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Clark	Horne
Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Turner
Ellis	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	Littlewood
Clark	Piquette
Connolly	Schneider
Coolahan	Schreiner
Dach	Starke
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Drever	Miller
Ellis	Orr
Hinkley	Renaud
Horne	Shepherd
Luff	Swann
McKitrick	Yao
McPherson	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Aheer	Littlewood
Drever	Pitt
Gill	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Piquette
Jabour	Pitt
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms Kazim
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Orr
Babcock	Rosendahl
Drever	Stier
Drysdale	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kleinsteuber	Taylor
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	Miller
Cooper	Nielsen
Goehring	Nixon
Gotfried	Pitt
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Carson	Miller
Fildebrandt	Nielsen
Gotfried	Panda
Hunter	Renaud
Littlewood	Turner
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Drysdale

Babcock	Malkinson
Dang	McPherson
Fraser	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	Vacant
Loewen	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, April 3, 2018

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect and pray, each in our own way. As we return from time with our families and loved ones in various corners of our province, let their support and patience inspire us to continue to have diligent compassion in our work as elected representatives. Amen.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

14. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices be authorized to meet during the consideration of the 2018-19 main estimates.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. By way of explanation I can indicate that on March 22 the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices made a formal request that the committee be authorized to meet during consideration of estimates this spring. Similar requests have been made and granted several times in recent years, most recently last year by the Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Are there any other members wishing to speak to the motion?

[Government Motion 14 carried]

Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Mr. Ceci moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate March 22: Mr. Nixon]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And to you and all members of the House, I hope that all members had a good constituency week and a joyful Easter holiday as well.

Madam Speaker, I rise to speak to the budget speech of the hon. Minister of Finance tabled just before we last broke 10 days ago. For decades Alberta has been the engine of Canada's prosperity. For decades we have had the highest incomes, the lowest unemployment, the lowest debt, the best fiscal position in the country. In fact, it was not long ago when we had zero net debt as a province. We celebrated that in 1994, when the former Premier, the late hon. Ralph Klein, stood up and announced that Alberta had paid off all that we owed. That's important to this province because this

is, I believe, the only province in Canada that actually defaulted on its debt – that's part of our history – during the crisis of the Great Depression. So Albertans have always understood the danger of debt until this government, which in this NDP budget is dragging Alberta deep into a sea of debt, of red ink, with no end in sight.

Madam Speaker, when the NDP came to office in the spring of 2015, Alberta's total liabilities, our total debt, stood at some \$13 billion. The week before last the hon. Finance minister announced a plan to increase that debt to nearly \$100 billion by the end of his fiscal plan; to be precise, \$96 billion. But that, first of all, was hidden. That figure appears nowhere in the budget documents.

I remember going in to read the budget in an embargoed lock-up prior to the minister's speech, and the very first question I asked of staff and officials was: "What are the total liabilities? What's the total debt?" We had to get out our calculators, Madam Speaker. In fact, it was the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat who had already done some advance calculating. He had figured out what the cumulative deficits were to be plus the capital borrowing through to the year 2023, and his number was confirmed by officials, a number that the Finance minister tried to hide from this Assembly and from Albertans, a \$96 billion number. The most important number in the budget was hidden in it. Talk about hidden agendas.

That \$96 billion itself is predicated on the rosier of scenarios. The government would have us believe that this is all predicated on, amongst other things, the Trans Mountain pipeline being built. To be clear, we certainly hope that happens, Madam Speaker, but it's a year behind schedule, and the New Democrats in British Columbia, the New Democrat government there, the New Democrat mayor of Vancouver, the New Democrat mayor of Burnaby, the New Democrat mayor of Coquitlam, the federal New Democrats, all of them are doing everything they can to stop that pipeline from actually being built. So to actually budget on such a high level of uncertainty is at best imprudent and at worst reckless. Ninety-six billion dollars means that we as Albertans will be spending billions of dollars enriching bankers and bondholders rather than funding public services. That's the consequence of debt, enriching bankers and bondholders in Zurich and Tokyo, in Toronto and New York rather than building schools and hospitals here in Alberta.

Now, the NDP started with a \$13 billion debt, or they inherited a \$13 billion debt, I should say. They've run massive deficits ever since, borrowing on average nearly a billion dollars every month. There is virtually no change in this budget, with a projected deficit of \$9 billion, Madam Speaker, so we're borrowing \$800 million, \$850 million a month. We're going to those bankers to borrow that money with a commitment to pay it back down the line plus interest, interest that is nonnegotiable.

Madam Speaker, this has led already to \$56 billion in debt today. We've gone from \$13 billion to \$56 billion in debt. This means that we are now paying \$1.92 billion in interest payments at \$56 billion in debt. By the way, the reckless fiscal mismanagement of the NDP has led now to six credit downgrades. Now, I know that whenever this happens, the Finance minister bristles. I think he once ran off down to Toronto to plead with the Dominion Bond Rating Service agency and Standard & Poor's and the other bond-rating agencies, "Please don't downgrade us," but they promptly did so. About two weeks after he left his meetings in Toronto, they sized up what he had said, they sized up the fiscal credibility of this NDP government, and they said that there is none. There is no credible plan to get back to balance, and six credit downgrades have followed.

Now, I know that many of my friends opposite think: oh, those are just bad people in Toronto and New York who don't understand

how compassionate we are. No, Madam Speaker. These are hard-nosed financial experts. They aren't motivated by sentiment or politics. They simply analyze numbers. That's all they are. They're objective analysts of numbers, and the numbers that they have seen from this government in the last three years tell them that there is zero credibility in the fiscal plans of the NDP; hence, six credit downgrades.

Now, these downgrades are not some abstraction. It's not some notional, like, reputational problem. This has real, hard, concrete, real-life consequences for the lives of Albertans. Why? Each time that our credit is downgraded – guess what? – we have to pay more in interest on that debt, and we're borrowing money to pay interest on that debt. It's the vicious cycle of debt. It's something that Albertans understand but apparently this government doesn't. Six credit downgrades. Fifty-six billion dollars in debt. A \$9 billion deficit. Headed to endless deficits and by the end of their fiscal plan a \$96 billion debt with – get this, Madam Speaker – over \$3.7 billion in projected debt interest payments.

10:10

Now, let's put this in a little bit of context in terms of what we are spending on debt interest. The current debt interest bill of this government, \$1.921 billion – that's how much we spend every year – is enough to build 98 new schools based on \$393 million per school or to build one new major hospital at least. The huge new Calgary south campus hospital was a \$1.3 billion capital expenditure, less than we spend on interest this year, \$600 million less. It would be enough to pay the salaries of 33,000 teachers or enough to hire 25,000 nurses, based on average salaries.

Madam Speaker, as it is, this government is spending more to enrich bankers through interest payments than we spend on 19 of the 23 government departments. Only four government departments spend more than this Finance minister's interest bill. So I would appeal to the hon. ministers opposite, as they struggle to provide public services and to make challenging fiscal decisions, to think about the consequences of this overspending, of this massive borrowing, of this growing debt interest burden. It means that for 19 of the 23 ministers their departmental budgets are less than the payments that we make to bankers and bondholders in Zurich, Toronto, and New York.

Now, Madam Speaker, you know, this is not consistent with the best traditions of the prairie New Democrats. I grew up in Saskatchewan like many Albertans, and I remember Tommy Douglas, who ran consistently balanced budgets. You know why? Because he understood that it was immoral to spend money that belongs to future generations without their consent, to engage in massive intergenerational transfers of wealth, particularly in good times, and he also understood that it was immoral to enrich bankers and bondholders rather than focus public resources on social programs. That's why Tommy Douglas and, after him, Roy Romanow made difficult decisions to manage their spending, to be efficient, even to be parsimonious when times required it. Former Premier Roy Romanow made tough decisions to reduce overall government spending in Saskatchewan, to stop the downward cycle into debt because they understood the consequences of that. Sadly, the New Democrats opposite are completely disconnected from that tradition of responsibility of fiscal management of the prairie New Democrats.

Madam Speaker, this budget, because of the massive new borrowing and no credible plan to restore fiscal balance, has already resulted in warning signals coming from the credit-rating agencies. In fact, the Dominion Bond Rating Service essentially said that this budget shows no plan to restore fiscal balance. Why is this happening? The NDP has raised tax rates, so presumably they're

getting a lot more revenue. Oh, but that's not true. It's not happening. They raised taxes on job creators and businesses. The NDP, motivated by its ideology of resentment and its philosophy of punishing entrepreneurs, raised taxes on businesses. They also raised taxes on incomes, and guess what's happened? For every one of the last three years revenues generated by business and income taxes have declined. Higher rates, lower revenues. Higher business tax rates, lower business tax revenues. Higher income tax rates, lower income tax revenues.

A message to my New Democrat colleagues opposite, Madam Speaker: when they get excited about their class warfare rhetoric, when they say, "We're soaking the rich; we're taking it to those evil, job-creating businesses," when they really get their socialist spirits up about the social justice of taxing more wealth creators and job creators, they should reflect for a moment and realize that they're actually generating less revenue.

Why? In part, because they've done what the left always does. They have attacked the wealth-creating capacity of the economy, and people have responded. What New Democrats do not seem to understand is that capital money is fluid. People are not forced to reside in Alberta, and high net worth individuals, many of them, have relocated their residences outside of this province because, between the increase in tax rates imposed by the New Democrats concurrent with the tax increases of their close ally Justin Trudeau in 2015, we've ended up taking the highest marginal income tax rate in Alberta from 38 per cent to 49 per cent, a massive increase in the overall burden. And guess what, Madam Speaker? People respond to disincentives. When governments disincentivize working, saving, and investing, people tend to do less of it.

That's why so much capital has been relocated outside of Alberta, not just personal income taxes but business taxes as well. In the past 18 months alone, we have seen an estimated \$35 billion of capital pulled out of the oil and gas sector in Alberta alone, redeployed to the oil and gas sector in other parts of the world at the same global prices, money that's no longer being taxed in Alberta, no longer producing jobs or wealth.

Now, Madam Speaker, why, then, a \$9 billion deficit? Why, then, a government that's moving debt from \$13 billion to nearly \$100 billion, interest payments from \$1.3 billion in 2015 to \$3.7 billion in 2023? Why? Why is this happening? Well, Madam Speaker, it's not happening because of inadequate revenues. The government has raised the tax rates. It's happening primarily because this government is incapable of managing their expenditures. In fact, government spending is up by 16 per cent since the NDP came to office, faster than the rate of growth in inflation, population, or the economy itself.

If, according to Professor Trevor Tombe at the University of Calgary and others, the government had simply decided not to cut spending but not to increase it, to effectively freeze spending at 2015 levels, which were, by the way, already the highest – by far, the highest – per capita program spending of any provincial government in Canada, the highest level of spending in our fiscal history by orders of magnitude, if they had maintained that extraordinarily, historically and relatively, high level of spending, we would be at a balanced budget next year, Madam Speaker. If they were simply to freeze spending now and we were to get reasonable rates of economic growth, 2 or 3 per cent, they would have a balanced budget by 2022-23, but they're not doing that either. They're continuing to increase spending faster than inflation, faster than the rate of growth in our economy and, in so doing, diving us deeper and deeper and deeper into debt that we have to repay with interest.

Oh, I forgot. It's true that they did raise rates on income and business taxes and had revenues decline, but baked into this budget

is a continuation of the largest tax hike in Alberta history. In the 2015 election campaign, Madam Speaker, the NDP ran on a platform. I actually have it on my desk right here, handily. It's an important reference guide. They ran on a platform which enumerated – let me count – five tax increases, seven tax adjustments altogether, a couple of reductions like the health care levy, but four tax increases.

10:20

I'll read these into the record, Madam Speaker, for your edification. Remove health care levy. Remove user fees: commendable. Restore charitable tax credit: good call. Personal income tax increase: we've already covered that. Corporate tax increase: we've discussed how revenues have come down. They were projecting they would go up every year; they've gone down. Delinquent corporate tax collection: well, that's a good one, but revenues have gone down. It hasn't worked. Railway fuel adjustment tax: that was just a \$10 million item.

Did anybody hear anything about a carbon tax here, a carbon levy? Madam Speaker, this is page 24. This is the appendix of the NDP platform, entitled Leadership for What Matters, published by the New Democrat Party in the last campaign. I cannot find the words "carbon tax." In fact, to cure my insomnia, I read the whole platform, all 24 pages, a lot of pictures. I couldn't find a single reference to carbon tax or carbon levy or consumer tax or energy consumption or energy tax or de facto consumption – zero reference, zero allusion – and five, six months later the government announced the largest tax increase in Alberta history, the multibillion-dollar carbon tax.

Now, Madam Speaker, you know, sometimes I'm accused of being naive. You can try to believe the best about people, that they're telling you the truth and they're being transparent and all that, right? You want to. In politics I think that's important for the sake of civility, that we give each other a bit of credit. I might be sometimes naive, but I'm not really that stupid. I don't know about my colleagues here, but I don't think there's a single person in Alberta, least of all the hon. the Premier and her front bench, who didn't understand that they were going to impose a carbon tax. That was essential in their plan. They hid it. It was the biggest hidden agenda in Alberta political history.

Now, Madam Speaker, when I came to this place and started participating in question period for the first time, three weeks ago, I wanted to follow up on this big NDP hidden agenda, so I asked the hon. the Premier in question period when the NDP planned to raise their job-killing carbon tax from \$30 to \$50 a tonne, because the government has announced their intention of doing so.

By the way – get this – do you know the reason why they've said they were going to increase the carbon tax, Madam Speaker? Do you know why? Because Justin Trudeau asked them to – you can't make this up – because Justin Trudeau in Ottawa told them that they're not punishing Alberta consumers enough, that they're not making it expensive enough for seniors to heat their homes when it's 30 below outside, that it's not punishing working Albertans for getting in their cars and trucks and driving to work. Justin Trudeau said, "We've got to punish them more," and our Premier said, "Yes, Prime Minister; I'll do what you tell us to." The history of Alberta Premiers is one of standing up for and fighting for the interests of working men and women in Alberta. Now, for the first time, arguably, in our history we have a government who thinks their job is to say, "Ready, aye, ready" when Justin Trudeau gives them orders. He ordered them to raise their carbon tax by 50 per cent.

But I've got a theory about this, Madam Speaker. Why was the government, the NDP, so eager to please Justin Trudeau when he asked them to raise their job-killing carbon tax by 67 per cent, from

\$30 to \$50 a tonne? I'll tell you why. Because they really want to. It's about more government control. It's about more government money, taking more out of the pockets of taxpayers that they can spend.

You see, here is the fundamental difference between members of the Official Opposition and members of the government. We believe, like, I think, most Albertans, that an ordinary, average working Albertan, that a senior on a fixed income, that a homemaker or an entrepreneur knows better how to spend an extra buck than a bunch of politicians and bureaucrats. That's the fundamental difference when you get right down to it, Madam Speaker, and that's why they're more than happy to have the cover, the political cover, of Justin Trudeau's carbon tax proposal to raise it by 67 per cent.

I apologize, Madam Speaker; I caught a cold over the weekend.

Madam Speaker, I asked the Premier when they plan to raise the carbon tax by 67 per cent, and she stood in her place opposite and gave an answer I was actually pretty impressed with. I commended her for the answer. She said that she would not raise it until the Kinder Morgan pipeline was constructed. That's an improvement because before she gave a blank cheque to Justin Trudeau. She said that she'd raise it regardless. Then after that she changed her condition and said that she'd raise it if Kinder Morgan was approved. It was approved. Then she changed it to say: if construction begins. I think before she said: if construction ends. I don't know. Her position keeps changing, but somehow, notionally she has tied the carbon tax increase to the construction of Kinder Morgan. I thought that was great.

But imagine my surprise, Madam Speaker, when I opened the budget 10 days ago, two weeks ago, only to find that the carbon tax increase is baked into the budget, the 67 per cent. They're already planning how to spend that money. The \$97 billion debt, the \$3.7 billion in interest payments: that's predicated on a 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax, that they never mentioned to Albertans, which, as recently as two weeks ago, they denied their intention to raise without conditions. Those conditions, to be clear, have evaporated in the Finance minister's budget. There is no mention of any conditionality for the 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax, no tying it to any pipelines. It's just the blank cheque that their friend and ally Justin Trudeau asked for.

What does this mean?

Mr. Nixon: How high will they go?

Mr. Kenney: How high, indeed, because the Premier has said, as I've quoted many times, that the carbon tax will continue to have to increase.

You know why? Let's cut the obfuscation here, to be polite, to use a parliamentary word here. Let's just be blunt. Let's call a spade a spade, Madam Speaker. What is going on here is that the NDP understands what the fans and supporters of carbon taxes understand, which is that you don't get anywhere in any measurable or meaningful reduction of CO₂ output or greenhouse gas output as a result of a \$20 or \$30 or even \$50 carbon tax.

I know that to be true, Madam Speaker, because I've asked the government: by how much will CO₂ emissions be reduced as a result of the carbon tax? They cannot, they will not answer the question because the answer is zero measurable reduction because the experts who support carbon taxes say that the price has to be at least \$200 per tonne. That's Professor Leach at the University of Alberta, who wrote their carbon tax plan. He says: \$200 per tonne plus a lot of other measures. Environment Canada is closer to the consensus on this point when they say that it has to be \$300 a tonne.

Madam Speaker, I know that members opposite love getting on their moral high horse and pretending that they're, quote, saving the planet with their \$30 carbon tax when they know perfectly well that the only way they can have a snowball's chance in Hades of achieving the Paris convention climate targets on greenhouse gas emissions for Canada through a carbon tax would be a 1,000 per cent increase in the tax, at least a 1,000 per cent increase in the tax.

10:30

That's what they believe, Madam Speaker, in their ideological, socialist heart of hearts, that that's a good thing. It's more government control of the economy. It's more of us telling people to change how they live their lives, as the Premier did when she suggested that people take the bus more often to work. I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but there are very few Albertans I know who are able to take a bus in Chestermere or in Rocky Mountain House or in most of Calgary. Sure, people use public transit when it's convenient, but to live a modern life in a cold northern economy, guess what? I know it's a terrible thing, but people have to drive cars.

The Premier says: take the bus, and change the way you live your lives, and if you don't do it, we're going to punish you with a punitive tax, a tax based on the consumption of energy in a cold northern, modern economy. Madam Speaker, they love the idea. So let's cut the nonsense here. What's really going on? It's called the frog in the pot. You take a frog and drop it into a pot of cold water – he likes the cold water – and you gradually turn that up to lukewarm. It's a little more comfortable. He's getting relaxed. You turn it up from lukewarm to a very low simmer, and he doesn't quite notice. Then simmer goes to warm, and the warm goes to boiling. Before you know it, Madam Speaker, you've got a boiled frog. But if you drop a frog in a pot of boiling water, he jumps right out. The boiling point is \$200 or \$300 a tonne. The cold water was \$20 a tonne.

Madam Speaker, this is incrementalism. That's all it is. They and their close ally Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government are trying incrementally to get Canadians used to a punitive tax on their consumption of energy so that they didn't notice, really, when it went from \$20 to \$30 a tonne on January 1, a 50 per cent increase three months ago. They're hoping that they won't notice when it goes from \$30 to \$40 a tonne, baked into this budget, and that they won't really notice when it goes from \$40 to \$50 a tonne and then from \$50 to \$80 and from \$80 to eventually \$200. Let's be absolutely clear. It would be nice.

You know, Madam Speaker, I understand the NDP's concern about climate change. I, too, am concerned about climate change. But if they were sincere in their concern, in their belief that carbon taxes could mitigate climate change, then they'd be honest with themselves and with Albertans. They'd be honest. Let's have an honest debate about this and say, as the NDP should say because they believe this, that we need a carbon tax of \$200 or \$300 a tonne. There's only one reason they won't, because they know Albertans would laugh in their faces.

Two and a half years after the NDP announced their carbon tax intentions, every single poll on the issue indicates that a supermajority of Albertans are resolutely opposed to the job-killing carbon tax, on average about 67 per cent. That's even after the NDP has spent millions of our tax dollars telling Albertans why it's in their interests to spend more in taxes to government for the energy they consume. Sixty-seven per cent, on average, opposed. Even in the environment minister's own riding, where she's lectured people for two and a half years about the need to be punished for consuming energy in a cold climate, the vast majority oppose the carbon tax. That, Madam Speaker, was at a carbon tax rate of \$20 a

tonne. Imagine where Albertans will be at \$50 a tonne. Imagine if the NDP was honest with Albertans and said: we need a \$250-, \$300-per-tonne carbon tax.

Madam Speaker, what really disturbs me is not just the negative economic impact of this huge tax, which has prolonged and deepened one of the longest recessions in Alberta history, but it's the fundamental mendacity, the dishonesty at the heart of the NDP's management of this issue.

The Premier said on April 15, 2016, here at the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce that "every penny raised by the carbon levy will be rebated back to Albertans or put back to work for our economy in new economic initiatives." You know, I have great respect for our Premier, Madam Speaker. I think she is an intelligent, committed, and capable leader. I respect her personally. I respect her office. I respect her so much that I'm going to quote that again. "Every penny raised by the carbon levy will be rebated back to Albertans or put back to work for our economy in new economic initiatives." Oh, I've got another quote from the hon. the Premier, from November 24, 2015, the *Globe and Mail*. The situation is the carbon tax. "This is not a situation where we're going to apply it against the deficit, for instance, to maintain current operations, or anything like that." Understandable commitments. That's what they've been saying since the day they announced it.

But, Madam Speaker, they have now admitted it, not formally in the budget documents but yet again as a hidden agenda. The Finance minister and the Premier were forced to come clean with Albertans, in questioning from the media on budget day, that this is no longer true, that every incremental dollar raised through their higher carbon tax will go to general government spending, to the NDP slush fund, to whatever they want. Zero additional rebates for the incremental revenues. Zero spending notionally tied to environmental or green initiatives. Sorry, folks. No more free shower heads or light bulbs or faucets. They're not going to raise a dime more to hire a company from Ontario to come in and change our light bulbs. Probably a good thing.

Madam Speaker, that additional revenue, from \$30 to \$50 a tonne, which they're now blaming on their buddy Justin Trudeau – it's hilarious. They're calling it the Trudeau tax. That additional tax rate will generate revenue. One hundred per cent of it will go to general government revenues and not go back to Albertans for rebates or to work for our economy. The carbon tax itself, the biggest whopper – is that parliamentary? – in Alberta political history, is now compounded by yet more mendacity, yet more falsehood from this government to Albertans. So we will end up paying more.

What does this budget come down to? More debt and more taxes, higher debt and higher taxes. Now, only the NDP thinks that the path to prosperity is paved with higher debt and taxes. Economic history tells us otherwise, Madam Speaker. One of the things that concerns me about this budget and the rhetoric surrounding it is this notion that happy times are here again. The Finance minister keeps telling us that we're on fire with a great huge recovery and that Albertans are back on track when first of all he has never taken responsibility for his high-tax policies, the massive additional red tape and regulatory burden of this government, massive new labour costs, massive new costs for entrepreneurs, all of which poured fuel onto the flames of the recession.

You know, Madam Speaker, when you're in a recession, what's technically happened? Technically you're in at least two quarters of negative economic growth. When I grew up in rural Saskatchewan, one of the lessons I learned is that when you're in a hole, stop digging. But what did the NDP do in this economic trough? They got out their shovels and kept digging. They made the hole deeper. They deepened and prolonged the recession.

10:40

Now, I know, Madam Speaker, they like to blame international commodity prices. They claim that we are the hapless victims of global commodity prices. Well, the truth is this. The global price for oil is bouncing around \$62 a barrel right now. That is an historic high. I mean, not an absolute high, but it's higher than the average throughout our modern history, substantially higher than the average. In fact, the Klein government in the 1990s eliminated the largest provincial deficit in Canada, went on to eliminate the debt, brought in a flat tax, presided over the highest levels of growth, the highest incomes, and the lowest levels of unemployment in Canada, averaging about \$20 a barrel for oil. In one of those years oil was down as low as \$11 per barrel.

We have been through fluctuations in commodity prices before, and obviously – obviously – when there's a downturn in those prices, they do affect incoming revenues, and they do affect the treasury. Madam Speaker, when that happens, the challenge for the government is to adopt policies that incentivize investment and growth, not punish those things. But this government raised income taxes, raised business taxes, and imposed the largest tax increase in Alberta history, the multibillion-dollar, job-killing carbon tax. They raised labour costs, they imposed massive new regulatory mandates on business, and now we've seen the flight of tens of billions of dollars of capital from Alberta.

The Finance minister says that it's all wonderful out there. Tell that, Madam Speaker, to the 175,000 Albertans who are on the unemployment lines. Tell that to the tens of thousands who have left the labour market and have given up looking for work altogether. Tell that to the tens of thousands of Albertans who have left our province, many of them, I know, immigrants who chose Alberta as the land of opportunity, only to come here to face unemployment or underemployment and who have since left for greener pastures. Tell that to the tens of thousands of small-business owners who have lost their businesses and often with them their life savings, their hopes, and their dreams. Tell that to Albertans who are working for less. You know, amongst some of the people who have gained employment in the past year, many are working for substantially less than they did before. They've gone from good, high-paying, often six-figure jobs to unreliable piecemeal or contract work at much lower levels of income. That is the economic reality in Alberta today, a reality made worse by this government's policies.

There was no effort in this budget to restore fiscal health to our province. There was no effort to restore investor confidence, which has been so dramatically lost. There was no effort to constrain spending. Oh, and by the way, Madam Speaker, I expected that. In the fall the Premier said that there would be – I think it was her phrase – compassionate cuts or compassionate restraint.

Mr. Panda: Belt-tightening.

Mr. Kenney: Compassionate belt-tightening.

Well, I've tightened my belt a couple of notches lately, Madam Speaker, and I was expecting to see the government do the same. I was getting ready for the belt-tightening season. It turns out that they're letting it out another notch. They're not tightening. They had to go and buy a new belt, a bigger one, because their spending is going up by another 16 per cent under this fiscal plan, faster than inflation, faster than population growth, faster than the economy.

Madam Speaker, what happened? What happened to the Premier's promise? Perhaps in this debate one of the members opposite could give this one a shot. Why did the Premier tell us that a hundred per cent of carbon tax revenues would go to rebates and so-called green spending when that's not true? Why did the Premier

say that there would be belt-tightening, i.e. reduced expenditures in this budget, when they're actually increasing spending? Why did the NDP – oh, I forgot to mention this. In this platform that I quoted from earlier it says: fiscal year 2018-19. This is the NDP platform. It says under total deficit or surplus for this fiscal year: a surplus of \$25 million. Now they think balanced budgets are a terrible thing, but when they sought the votes of Albertans, when they went door-knocking, when they dropped off this brochure, Madam Speaker, they said: "We're committed to fiscal responsibility. We believe in balanced budgets. You vote for us, and we'll give you a \$25 million surplus in fiscal year 2018-19." Instead, a \$9 billion deficit.

Now, before I'm done, could I ask one of my colleagues to get out their calculator and figure out by what percentage are they off? A \$25 million surplus but a \$9 billion deficit: the math is so big. I don't know, Madam Speaker, but it's a lot. They're off by \$9 billion. That's not a little whoopsy. That's not a Justin Trudeau eensy, teensy, weensy, little deficit. I know the Finance minister is going to stand up and he's going to tell us that the only option to all of this reckless borrowing, reckless debt is . . .

Mr. Nixon: The iPhone won't do it.

Mr. Kenney: What is it you've got? The calculator is not big enough, Madam Speaker, to figure out the percentage difference, and with all the discovery math these guys don't know their math anymore. It's making me hoarse just talking about this.

Madam Speaker, I know the Finance minister is going to tell us that the only option, the only way to keep their promise is, they will say, reckless cuts to front-line services. Of course, I think sometimes New Democrats repeat that line in their sleep.

In fact, Madam Speaker, we want to talk about how irresponsible they can be. The day after the budget, on March 23, the Premier's director of communications, Ms Oates, tweeted the following. "There is a very quick way to deal with debt. Blow up all our hospitals & schools or raise everyone's taxes through the roof." Honestly, I'm not making that up. I'd be happy to table that. I don't think it's been deleted.

The spokesperson for the hon. the Premier says that the only alternative to the government's violation of its election commitment, the only alternative to a \$96 billion debt, the only alternative to a 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax, the only alternative is to "blow up all our hospitals & schools," not just some of them, Madam Speaker. You know, it's remarkable. The NDP fiscal apocalypse is getting worse and worse by the day.

When I was running for this seat in the Legislature back in December in Calgary-Lougheed, my NDP opponent, a very esteemed physician, a good man, a great candidate, said – presumably it was Ms Oates who suggested this brilliant talking point to him – that I wanted to shut down every hospital in the province. Now they've expanded that, Madam Speaker. In the space of three months we've gone from shutting down just every hospital to every hospital and every school, and we've gone from shutting them down to blowing them up.

When I read this quote, I thought of that great skit with John Candy and Eugene Levy on *SCTV*, a celebrity farm blow-up. You know, that's what this is turning into. It's like a *SCTV* episode over there, Madam Speaker. How do they expect anybody to take them seriously?

Madam Speaker, here's a news flash for my New Democrat colleagues opposite. Yes, it is possible to restrain spending without blowing up every school and hospital. If the government had simply kept spending increases at zero in the past three years, we'd be, basically, at a balanced budget now without closing a single school or hospital. If the government were to freeze spending now without

closing, let alone blowing up, a school or hospital, they'd be at a balanced budget a year before they propose without unrealistic revenue growth presumptions and without their 67 per cent increase in the job-killing carbon tax. So it's 360 . . . [interjection] Oh, wow. Okay. I got the number. Congratulations. Somebody here knows how to work a calculator. Is it the Member for Calgary-Hays that did that? I want to give him credit.

10:50

An Hon. Member: In case I get it wrong, yes.

Mr. Kenney: It turns out, Madam Speaker, that a \$9 billion deficit this year is 360 times larger than the \$25 million surplus that the NDP committed to. Oh, and, by the way, I know what they're going to say, that when they presented this \$25 million surplus – this is the one they ran on; this is the one they told Albertans about when they asked for their votes; this is why they're sitting in this Chamber, in part – the economy was already in the tank. We'd already seen the huge plummet in energy prices. The previous PC government had already recognized that. This was not a surprise. So the NDP commitment, a \$25 million surplus this year, was made with eyes wide open.

All that's happened since then, Madam Speaker – and, really, you have to ask yourself: why did the Premier prepare us for belt-tightening? In fact, let me offer people a little insight into politics. When a head of government begins talking like that, it's called prepositioning. It's getting the public ready for some difficult decisions. That's what's called prepositioning. That was the deliberate message of the government in the fall, but it didn't happen in the budget. What happened between compassionate belt-tightening and a hundred billion dollar debt?

I'll tell you what happened, Madam Speaker. The NDP cabinet met, and undoubtedly the public service brought forward various options on spending restraint, and the NDP cabinet couldn't say yes to any of it. This is a classic example of a failure of leadership.

Now, Madam Speaker, at similar times Tommy Douglas and his Saskatchewan NDP cabinet and Roy Romanow and his Saskatchewan NDP cabinet rose to the occasion. They made difficult decisions. They kept or got their province out of deficit. That's not happening anymore. That's not happening with this government.

So here we have the NDP that's 360-fold off of their surplus projection for the current fiscal year, taking us from \$13 billion to \$96 billion in debt, from \$1.2 billion to \$3.7 billion in interest payments, already spending more in interest than all but four of the government departments.

Let me pause there to say that I wonder if the New Democrats, Madam Speaker, always, you know, proud of their class warfare, their egalitarianism, their passionate desire to stick it to the wealthy and redistribute wealth: are they proud that they're enriching bankers and bondholders in Toronto, New York, and Zurich? Does that make them really happy? Is that social justice, to take money from low-income taxpayers, to punish seniors for heating their homes when it's 30 below outside in order to send a growing portion of that money to billionaire bankers? Is that why they ran for public office? Is that why they became New Democrats? Is that why they're social democrats? Is that why they believe in egalitarianism and wealth redistribution, so they could be in government to tax the poor and give to the rich through debt interest payments? That's exactly what they're doing.

Madam Speaker, this is the consequence of a government that was – let's be honest – unprepared to govern from day one. This is the consequence of a government that has an inability to make difficult choices. This is a consequence of a government that

believes that wealth can be redistributed without that wealth being created in the first place. This is a consequence of a government that believes that it can tax and borrow and regulate its way to prosperity.

Their recent policy on corporate welfare for a hand-picked number of companies: they've decided to give a billion dollars to hand-picked energy companies after nearly \$40 billion has left that industry in Alberta to go to that industry in other parts of the world at the same global prices. Madam Speaker, their doing so reminds me of what Ronald Reagan said socialists always do. He said that their attitude is at first to tax it; and if it keeps moving, regulate it; and if it stops moving, subsidize it. That in three lines sums up the economic philosophy of the NDP.

Madam Speaker, I'll just close by saying that while this budget is a fiscal disaster for Albertans, while we will have to work for years and years to come to get ourselves out of the hole into which they have dug us, while we will have to reignite Alberta's economy and restore investor confidence to re-create this province as the job-creating engine of Canada, while all of those things are true, I think that the most disturbing aspect of this budget is the deep dishonesty within it: their failure to be forthcoming with Albertans about the \$100 billion debt and their failure to be forthcoming about the 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax, whose imposition they denied from day one, 100 per cent of which incremental revenues go to the government's bottom line.

Well, Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Official Opposition and I believe on behalf of the vast majority of Albertans, we reject this government's reckless mortgaging of our future. We reject this government's deepening of an investment crisis in this province. We reject this government's denial of the economic pain being felt by hundreds of thousands of ordinary Albertans every day. We ourselves will work every day over the course of the next year to present Albertans with a fully costed and credible fiscal and economic plan to reignite our economy and to renew the Alberta advantage.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's with great intentness and great reverence that I rise to speak because as one of the members in this Chamber who's lived for almost 65 years close to the social gospel experiment known as Saskatchewan and living in Alberta, I want to abuse the Member for Calgary-Lougheed's vocal chords a little more to give some examples of the unintended consequences. He should well know, being a former resident of Saskatchewan, the advantages of the Alberta environment, the Alberta advantage, where we have allowed ourselves to come from chains to freedom whereas Saskatchewan sought the example of taking freedom to chains and only now have 1.1 million people where in Alberta we have north of 4 million people. I'd ask the Member for Calgary-Lougheed to please expound on that.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, just hesitate.

Hon. member, yes?

Mr. Westhead: Point of order there, Madam Speaker. It's my understanding that there's no 29(2)(a) on the second speaker after . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I appreciate that, but the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition is actually the third speaker on this.

Mr. Nixon: I was the second speaker.

The Acting Speaker: He does have 29(2)(a).

Mr. Nixon: I'll send you some standing orders later.

The Acting Speaker: I will now return.

I apologize, hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler. Were you finished?

Mr. Strankman: Absolutely, Madam Speaker. If the member would respond. Thank you.

Mr. Kenney: Well, I thank my hon. colleague from the Drumheller-Stettler constituency for the question and his service. Madam Speaker, the member raises a very prescient historical comparison. In 1944, when the CCF came to office in Saskatchewan, the headquarters of western Canada's oil and gas industry were located in Regina.

11:00

Mr. Nixon: And the insurance industry.

Mr. Kenney: And the insurance industry in western Canada. Regina was the Calgary of that time. Saskatchewan had a population of about a million, and Alberta about half of that at that time, after the Depression and after the war. But then the CCF, the parent party of the NDP, came to office. They raised business taxes. They raised personal taxes. They fiddled with the royalties. They created investor uncertainty. They massively increased the regulatory burden. They massively increased labour costs. They imposed massive new red tape. As one those corporate headquarters of the western Canadian oil and gas industries and financial services sectors picked up and moved west to Calgary.

Two provinces have followed different policy approaches for the following six decades. Alberta ended up with over four million people and Saskatchewan with still a million. Six decades of economic and demographic stagnation in one place; six decades of dynamic economic and demographic and social growth in the other. That is the difference that policy makes. It's, frankly, the difference that politics makes. But even in that Saskatchewan, where they drove investors and hard workers and entrepreneurs and talented young people out of the province, even they understood the importance of balanced budgets, unlike this crowd over here.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed for opening our eyes when he looked at the platform of the NDP in the last election, which I didn't pay attention to, and many Albertans probably didn't, otherwise the result would have been different. But since this government came to power, every single day in this House we were told that they're making life better for Albertans. Every single day they say that. On the other hand, you know, constituents in Calgary-Foothills are telling me that they can't afford life under this NDP government.

Like you mentioned, many people like me chose Alberta because it was debt free. That's the reason that I left Mumbai and came here. But now we are saddled with a potentially \$96 billion debt. After your speech I observed that all this front bench left. They can't take those facts anymore.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, if you could refrain from referencing whether individuals are in the House.

Mr. Panda: Okay. Thank you. I withdraw that. But I'm saying that the facts sometimes are tough for people to listen to and observe and appreciate, but I'd like to . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The time is now up on 29(2)(a).

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

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

[Motion carried]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Sweet moved, seconded by Mr. Malkinson, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Debate adjourned March 22]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to reply to the Speech from the Throne for the Fourth Session of the 29th Legislature, delivered by Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor. Last week's Speech from the Throne was very meaningful to me on International Women's Day, delivered by a Lieutenant Governor who is a woman to an Alberta Legislature with the largest number of elected women, a gender-balanced cabinet, and, of course, a Premier who is a woman.

I would like to share a quote from the throne speech. "Women's rights are human rights, and your government celebrates them." A powerful statement but not without action. Since 2015 our government has taken many bold steps, and one of the first was creating the Status of Women ministry.

Let's contrast that bold and progressive action with what we know about the new leader of the UCP. While the leader of the UCP was PM Harper's lieutenant, he helped to erode women's equality in Canada by weakening organizations that could have and would have challenged attacks on women's reproductive rights, pay equity, and child care. The Harper government, which included the new leader of the UCP, systematically shut down 12 of 16 regional status of women offices, eliminated the court challenges program, and abandoned an agreement on universal health care.

I was not surprised to see zero positive reaction from the UCP when the throne speech celebrated women or when they voted against funding for sexual assault services across the province. It's clear who sets the tone over there, and the person setting that tone was a leader in a federal government that systematically turned the clock back on gender equality.

The World Economic Forum gender gap index ranked Canada seventh in 2004, and we fell to 30th in 2015. That means that under the Conservatives gender equality in Canada fell by 23 positions. While our government is choosing to support affordable child care and has invested resources to expand shelter spaces, sexual assault services, counselling, and crisis services for women, the track

record of the Leader of the Opposition is to systematically erode equality for women in Canada.

I've worked in Alberta all of my adult life and have raised both of my children here. Throughout that time Alberta was under the thumb of the Conservative Party, 44 years, to be exact. You know the drill: boom, bust. When oil prices were high, it was a spending free-for-all. When the bubble burst, we faced devastating cuts, that are still felt today, and massive infrastructure deficits. In St. Albert we continue to try and play catch-up by building schools that the Conservatives only announced with huge signs and ribbon-cutting ceremonies. The Sturgeon hospital finally received the needed funds for a boiler that should have been funded years ago.

Until 2015 I managed a nonprofit, created to support people with disabilities, enabling them to live their lives in the community. I think I became keenly interested in oil prices during that time. Why, you might ask? Because we knew that when the oil prices dropped, it meant cuts, clawbacks, and transformations that were not meant to address progressive growth. Changes were just cost savings. That's how it was. The opposition leader can tell you – he is quite a historical revisionist – his little story, but that was not the reality in Alberta.

I am so grateful that our government chose not to turn their backs on the day-to-day needs of families and people in Alberta. Listening to the sound advice of David Dodge, the former governor of the Bank of Canada, we invested in infrastructure and put people to work. Any pragmatic person knows that investing in infrastructure when costs are lower and unemployment is higher makes sense. Any sensible person knows that cutting essential services like education, health care, and disability supports while people are already struggling does not make sense. We've always known that.

I wasn't surprised that the UCP and their new boss didn't like the throne speech. Ask yourself why. Although we cannot know for sure how they would have managed the recession we were hit with, we can guess based on the Leader of the Opposition's record in Ottawa. The Leader of the Opposition believes himself to be an economic saviour. I think he engages in fantasy economics. There's a reason that he won't show you a concrete plan: he can't.

Under Harper our country's real GDP grew barely enough to keep up with population growth. He doesn't tell you that, though, when he gives you the history lesson. Under Harper and the Member of Calgary-Lougheed our country had the worst job-creation record since 1946. Our job-creation rate under his leadership was slower than the rate of population growth.

Let's be clear. The 2015 recession was under Harper's watch. Many people have suggested that the only reason the oil price slump could tip the entire country into a recession was because our economy had so little momentum in the first place. Over the many years that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed was in Ottawa and in power, his government ran a string of six deficit budgets. Six. Then we entered a recession.

To quote from the throne speech: "When government fails to work for people, inequality rises." This has to include all people as defined by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This document is important to Albertans and Canadians.

11:10

I know one person in this Chamber that appears to disagree with the human rights as defined in our Charter. The leader of the UCP, then minister for immigration, wanted to force women who chose to wear a niqab not to do so during citizenship ceremonies. The federal Court of Appeal sided with the previous lower court ruling that struck down government policy banning face covering during a citizenship ceremony. The leader of the UCP also shut down family reunification immigration for two years. He apparently

needs an English-to-English translation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

While organizations, businesses, and governments around the world are finding ways to support women making Me Too disclosures of sexual harassment and misconduct, here in Alberta we have a new political party that promotes a man who chose – keyword "chose" – not to protect a woman who disclosed sexual harassment but to fire her. According to the new leader of the UCP he was young, so that's okay. He was promoted and made House leader. That's okay. That is the kind of behaviour that has perpetuated and condoned systemic sexual harassment in the workplace.

I'm not surprised the UCP and their new leader didn't appreciate the tone and commitment expressed in the throne speech. It doesn't match their values. Religious freedoms seem only to extend to people who believe the same as they do. Women's rights are human rights, and our government will work to protect them and preserve access.

We know that the single greatest challenge facing our world is the reality of man-made climate change. Thousands of scientists, leaders in their field, agree that we must control and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The cost of doing nothing is astronomical. The leader of the UCP would rather spend his time on Twitter attacking doctors at the university, scientists. The Leader of the Opposition believes that climate change is simply a natural phenomenon, and he is worried about the indoctrination of our children in school when it comes to climate change. It's called science.

They say that the best predictor of the future is the past. Let's have a look at the Leader of the Opposition's actions related to science and climate change. Under his government's watch research programs monitoring climate change and ocean habitats were terminated. Under his government's watch thousands of scientists were dismissed, and the majority of the department of fisheries and oceans library was closed. Muzzling government scientists was the norm. Here's an example. Based on the government's direction the Environment Canada media office granted zero interviews after their team published a paper in 2011 concluding that a two-degree increase in global temperature was unavoidable by 2100.

I am grateful to live in a province that saw fit to elect a progressive government, one that believes in the human rights of all people, one that takes action to address climate change while protecting our province's resources and jobs. I'm grateful to live in a province that has a progressive government focused on a prosperous and inclusive future.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I listened to the member's response to the throne speech, and what I noticed – and this is my question to the member – is that the member spent a lot of time talking about previous federal governments and not what her government would be doing. She spent a lot of time talking about things that she seems to have disagreed on with the former Prime Minister Mr. Harper. I think she's got some of her facts mistaken, but that would be a matter of debate.

What was interesting to me, Madam Speaker, was that the member never rose and talked about the fact that she belongs to a government that has brought in a carbon tax that they did not campaign on, that now has a Premier and a Premier's office who

has told constituents in my constituency to fund raise to pay for their carbon tax, senior citizens that are on a fixed income to fund raise to pay for their carbon tax. The leader of her party has told my constituents to take a bus, not bothering to realize that there are no buses in our communities. She's called my constituents Chicken Little in the past.

Now we see over the constituency break, Madam Speaker, that this government is allowing seniors to have their carbon tax rebates taken away from them because the organizations and the housing that keeps care of them, of course, have increased costs as a result of the carbon tax. Those seniors now can't even depend on the limited carbon tax rebates that this government was providing. I notice the member won't stand up and talk about that.

Another interesting thing, Madam Speaker. The member never talked about the attack that this government has sustained on rural Alberta, particularly the agriculture community. You know, Bill 6, for example, and the brutal way that farmers and ranchers were treated in this province by this government: the member did not speak about that. Also, in regard to the throne speech the word "agriculture" was only used once in the entire speech. I notice the member doesn't want to talk about the fact that our second-largest industry doesn't even seem to be on the radar of this government.

She wants to continue to talk about the former Prime Minister inside this House. I find that disappointing. I'm a little bit interested in how the member can continue to stand up and attack other levels of government that aren't even in power right now and continue to gloss over . . . [interjections] You can see they're excited about it. They don't want to talk about their record but continue to gloss over the nonstop attack on everyday Albertans by this government. I mean, the hon. member is waving her hands around. I'm not sure what she's trying to say to me, Madam Speaker, but I'm sure she'll have a chance in a moment.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I do have the floor.

I notice that the hon. member does not want to talk about the damage that her government's policies are doing to Albertans. Now, if I was a member of that government, that's probably what I would want to do, too. I probably would not want to stand up in this House and talk about my record, because their record is nondefendable. They cannot defend their record. This is a government that has told seniors to fund raise to pay for their carbon tax, has completely ignored fixed-income seniors.

We've talked lots about the Sundre West Country Centre in this House. It's interesting that over the constituency break the Premier's office reached out to them yet again – because I keep bringing this issue up in the House – and suggested that they spend \$15,000 doing an energy assessment on their building. Fifteen thousand dollars. They can't afford to pay the carbon tax right now, and the government's new suggestion is to come up with another \$15,000. I don't know. Maybe they're supposed to fund raise for that.

If the hon. member wants to talk about the throne speech and her government's record, she should start to talk about her government's record. But she won't talk about her government's record; she'll talk about Stephen Harper and the federal Conservatives. Now, I'm a federal Conservative. I'm pretty proud of the federal Conservative record, but it's irrelevant to this conversation about this government's throne speech. [interjection] It's not relevant. They're heckling "debt" at me now, Madam Speaker. This government took it from \$13 billion to now \$100 billion in debt. I don't think they should heckle about that.

Mr. Westhead: I don't think it's \$100 billion in debt.

Mr. Nixon: No, you're right; \$96 billion is where they'll be at. I should have been more clear, Madam Speaker. It's \$96 billion.

I notice that the hon. member never stood up and talked about the fact that her government told Albertans that they would not use the carbon tax for general revenue, that they would make sure that the revenue from the carbon tax would go back to Albertans. Now we find out that hidden inside their budget is a carbon tax that is being put into general revenue just like the carbon tax that that hon. member went door-knocking in her riding on and never told anybody that that was coming.

Speaker's Ruling

Question-and-comment Period

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Just a reminder to all members of the House that 29(2)(a) is comments and questions, which means you should be able to provide time for an answer to a question. [interjections] Hon. members, we have done past practice in this House. I have reminded this House on more than one occasion that there must be time for a response from the individual that you are speaking to under 29(2)(a). It is in *Hansard*. I can pull the reference for you if you would like.

Debate Continued

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the government's Speech from the Throne. The constituents of Cardston-Taber-Warner elected me to make sure that their voices are heard in this Legislature, and I can tell you that they have strong feelings about this NDP government's agenda. The NDP government is, frankly, out of touch with the ordinary women and men of this province, and the agenda they have set out is yet further proof of this.

11:20

Since the Member for Calgary-Lougheed took his seat as Leader of the Official Opposition, this government has spent much time rewriting their positions to be more in line with what we have been saying and what he has been saying for the past months. Madam Speaker, when this government does come out with an idea of its own, it reeks of the out-of-touch, big-government philosophy that Albertans have clearly rejected. If this government ever understood what Albertans wanted, they have surely lost touch with that now.

If there is one clear example of this, it is the way the NDP have responded to the rural crime crisis. When we asked for an emergency debate last November, this government shot it down. With the gallery seats filled with victims of rural crime, this government's priorities were so out of sync with reality that they couldn't even take the time to meet with Albertans who had been repeatedly victimized and were calling for action, while our members have been meeting with Albertans all across the province on this issue. And even though the NDP have finally acknowledged that there is a serious problem, they are scarcely found at town hall meetings hearing the concerns of residents and front-line law enforcement officers. Madam Speaker, maybe if they showed up to listen to ordinary Albertans, they would have some idea of what they want and expect to see from their government.

They promised some extra officers and have promised new prosecutors, but they have yet to present a substantive plan on how to make these promises come to reality. Let us hope for the sake of rural Albertans that they have a plan beyond their announcement that they

intend to do something on this issue. Given this government's track record I am hardly optimistic.

Madam Speaker, the throne speech talked a lot about ensuring Canadian tidewater access for Alberta energy. I'm happy to talk about that subject at this point. Let's start with a Tzeponah Berman discussion. As we begin our conversation about getting Alberta's energy to tidewater, she plays an integral role in this. Tzeponah Berman is a radical environmental activist. Her anti-Alberta activism is a matter on record, yet in 2016 this radical environmentalist was appointed as co-chair of the Alberta NDP government's oil sands advisory group. This group was tasked with making recommendations on implementing the new climate leadership plan, reviewing impacts of oil sands operations, and proposing climate recommendations for the future. This government likes to lecture Albertans on what they call a world-leading climate plan. Let's be honest. By appointing Ms Berman, they sent a radical signal right off the bat that the only thing that we would be leading the world that is on track, the resource sector, that is the lifeblood of this province's economy, is down the drain.

Now, despite that Ms Berman has moved on to other things, going from enabling the damaging policies of the NDP to enabling the constitutional violations of the B.C. NDP and the illegal protest of radicals bent on the destruction of our job-creating industry, this government keeps telling Albertans to trust their plan for pipelines. They keep telling us that if we continue to place burdens on our industry, we will attain social licence. But, Madam Speaker, there is not a single environmentalist or left-wing politician that has been convinced by the actions of this government, not a single group that has come from the no to the yes on pipelines save for perhaps the hon. members across the way. But are they?

Now, I've said this before in this House. I had the opportunity, dealing with my insomnia, to read through the NDP's constitution. This is the Alberta NDP's constitution, not the federal's, just to be clear. [interjection] Yes. There probably isn't a difference. This is very interesting because constantly they have said that Ms Berman does not speak for the NDP, but what we find within their own constitution – it was right at the end, under appendix C, for your reading enjoyment. I'm just going to read a couple of things in here because we need to bring this into context. First of all, it says:

Socialism is essentially the application of democracy to the economy. Economic democracy, i.e. democratic socialism . . .

And here the NDP uses "economic democracy" and "democratic socialism" synonymously.

. . . assures production to supply the needs of all people.

It's very, very important to remember that. They believe that they can assure production to supply the needs of all people. I'm sure you've read in other books, in other records that same kind of concept. But we won't talk about that here at this point.

The market economy produces transnational corporations, who give private profit priority over public interest, social justice and workplace democracy.

It goes on to say:

Economic democracy demands a co-operative rather than a competitive system.

Now, you read through this stuff – and I'm going to carry on with this – and you begin to realize where the NDP are coming from. You have to read it to be able to believe it. I can honestly tell you, as I've talked to many people in my riding, that they don't believe this. They don't adhere to these kinds of principles and beliefs, and they think they're counterproductive to being able to create growth and prosperity for their families.

I want to read to you something that I think will put into perspective Ms Berman's actions, because they cannot keep on saying that Ms Berman does not represent an NDP ideology. In

reality she epitomizes it, and you'll realize why once I read this. It says:

Ecological Sustainability must permeate all economic and social policy. Meeting human material needs must not use more of Earth's resources than can be renewed within each generation.

I have no idea how the members opposite got here today. I hope that they walked or that they actually rode a bike because their own constitution, their own beliefs do not believe that they should be using nonrenewable resources.

Now, Madam Speaker, this statement says that we should not use oil or gas because, certainly, they cannot be renewed within each generation. They are adequately named nonrenewables for that reason. This is why everywhere I go in this province, I hear Albertans telling me that they don't believe the NDP when they say that they are fighting for the oil and gas workers of this province. Again, I've brought this up a few times, and I have actually yet to hear one of the NDP MLAs stand up and explain to me how this works with even the presentation that they have now, which is that they are advocates for the oil and gas sector in this province.

Now, this government keeps telling Albertans to trust their plan for pipelines. They keep telling us that if we continue to place burdens on our industry, we will attain social licence, but I can't imagine that if they really believe the constitution, that they probably helped write, they would be advocates for pipelines in all directions.

Madam Speaker, in this province we are extraordinarily blessed. Every other province in this country and every other country on this Earth would only wish to have the abundance of energy resources that we find here in Alberta. I'm not sure that everyone here appreciates how blessed we are. We have in this province the third-largest oil reserves anywhere in the world. We have an opportunity to be among the most prosperous societies in history, and unlike the other major oil producers of the world, this wealth is accompanied by the rule of law and freedom for every individual.

Madam Speaker, if this government seeks to set a new direction in this throne speech, then let them take the opportunity to unburden our industry and empower the market to unleash the productive potential of our province. We on this side of the House appreciate that the government has said that they will take a hard line with B.C. when it comes to obstructing the rule of law and ignoring the Constitution. We only hope that these are not just words but an actual commitment that will be backed up with action.

That said, this government needs to do more. They need to realize that the Trudeau Liberals in Ottawa are not friends of this province or this industry. The Premier must demand that the federal government take action to enforce the approved construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline. The time for going along to get along with Prime Minister Trudeau needs to be over. It is time to make sure that Alberta's voice is heard in the Confederation. The people of Alberta deserve as much, and frankly the economic success of our country demands it.

Madam Speaker, there is more that must be addressed here. The throne speech tries to paint a rosy picture, but Albertans see an entirely different reality. Calgary has one of the highest unemployment rates outside of the Maritimes. Many people across the province have exhausted their benefits in a futile bid to find employment. Across professions and across industries too many people have been let down by this government, too many people have had to give up, and too many people have lost sight of the dream that once was Alberta. Those who are employed, in many cases, have had to settle for a stopgap job out of their field and for considerably less pay just to keep themselves afloat. These aren't long-term solutions, and they aren't solutions that are making life better for Albertans.

11:30

Last night I had the opportunity of going to a restaurant. I had an opportunity to talk to the owner of the restaurant. He was actually from the oil and gas industry – he was an engineer – and he had gotten out of the oil and gas industry because he felt that the government was not supportive of it. He felt that there was no future for him in that industry anymore, so he had bought a restaurant, hoping to be able to try to make something for him and for his family. As I talked to him – he had spent many, many years going to university to become an engineer. That was his love. It was something that he enjoyed doing, yet he was in a position where he was forced into doing something else in order to be able to make ends meet for his family in a province that has the third-largest resources, oil and gas resources, in the world. We have an engineer that's being forced to do something else. If that is the definition of diversification, then I don't think Albertans want to have anything to do with it.

What they want is to have good-paying jobs. They want to be able to go to university and be able to provide for their families and for their prosperity. This is what I heard as I listened to this gentleman speak. Regular Albertans want this government to stop overburdening them with unnecessary taxes like the job-killing NDP carbon tax. They want jobs that will pay the mortgage. They want their towns to be vibrant communities. They want a government that doesn't pick winners and losers. They want a government that doesn't scare off investment coming into the province through ideological, socialist policies. Madam Speaker, I know that this is what regular Albertans want because it is what I hear every single day from the good people of Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Madam Speaker, this government talks a lot about diversification. In fact, they seem to be announcing a new government program or initiative at every corner. Well, I know that what I am about to say doesn't fit with the NDP ideological agenda, but it is the straight truth. Government programs, higher taxes, and multibillion-dollar deficits will not diversify our economy, full stop. It is the wealth and investment generated by our existing industries that will provide new opportunities in emerging sectors. It is the dollars created by the private sector that will fuel the economy of tomorrow.

Now, when I talk to people, I talk to people about what an economy is and about what our society in Alberta is like, and I talk to them about the analogy between the heart and head. The heart of a society is the wraparound services that the good people of Alberta are more than willing to be able to provide for each other. This is the heart. This is the schools and the health and the policing and the fire and the ambulance and all of the social programs that we've provided to be able to help when people are down, when they're out, to be able to help lift them, and to be able to help give them a sense of decency. The head part is the ability to be able to provide those services. The head part is the ability to be able to have entrepreneurs be able to create wealth, because you cannot spend the money unless you create it first, and this is what this government seems to have missed out on.

Conservatives understand that oil and gas is not what just makes up Alberta. They understand that there is more than just oil and gas, but they do know that it's a big part of our economy. If the government wants to spur investment and diversification, it needs to take yet another page from the playbook of the United Conservative Party: empower the free markets, support entrepreneurs and job creators by lowering taxes, cutting red tape, and getting the government out of the place that it does not belong.

Speaker's Ruling Question-and-comment Period

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Just before we move on to 29(2)(a), I'd like to clarify my comments from before. I have a few references that we can look back at to discuss the fact that we need to have comments and questions, which means comments plus questions, and allow the member to respond. On March 24, 2011, the hon. Speaker Kowalski referenced during the debate:

I think before we go on, I . . . want to remind the member, like the hon. Government House Leader has correctly said, that the five minutes for comments and questions are about the bill. And be concise so that other members can participate.

From November 21, 2012, by the hon. Speaker Zwozdesky:

I just want you to know. But 29(2)(a) was put in for a . . . good purpose, and I want to just ask you to consider what the real spirit of 29(2)(a) was for subsequent speakers after this one.

From November 21, 2012, by the hon. Speaker Zwozdesky:

The point I [am] trying to make is that Standing Order 29(2)(a) is usually reserved for short snappers back one way and the other. I realize this is a complex issue, and there's nothing the Speaker can do – you have the floor; you can speak the full five minutes if you want – but let's . . . keep in mind what the spirit of the debate aspect was when 29(2)(a) was . . . brought in. It's a unique feature of this Assembly.

From November 21, 2012, again, the hon. Speaker Zwozdesky:

[Please] review the purpose of 29(2)(a), with no reflection on the answer just given or the previous question. One person stands and asks a question. It takes 20, 30 seconds maybe, and then the person answering gets up and consumes the rest of the time.

I also did a ruling on March 22, 2018.

[Just reminding] all members of the House, before we move on, around 29(2)(a). It is comments and questions, but as you all know from past rulings, typically you leave time for the person to be able to respond to the questions.

I would like to clarify for all members that 29(2)(a) is for comments and questions, to allow the other person to respond.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for clarifying. Certainly, I don't want to run out the clock like the previous speaker under 29(2)(a) did.

Debate Continued

Ms Renaud: But I will ask a question to the member who just spoke to the Speech from the Throne. One of the things I enjoyed about the Speech from the Throne was the references to the need to work on inclusion and that "inclusion" is an action word. It takes actual work and it takes legislation and it takes investment to make it happen. To the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. I know that in the news over the last little while the city of Taber, I believe, has struggled with people vandalizing the pride flag. I think that it was at a municipal building. The first one was burned or stolen. I'm not sure. The second one was stolen. I know that a number of your constituents and others around Alberta wanted to know online or even in this House: why is it that you wouldn't say something about that or work with the city to ensure that all members, all citizens of that city felt safe and valued and included? I wonder if you could speak to that.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?
The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I wanted to go on a little bit on what the Member for St. Albert was talking about. I was actually at the first Taber pride flag raising last year. I would say that it was very emotional to be at the first flag raising in Taber and to see the constituents of the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner talk about how they needed support from both their local government, the provincial government, the federal government, and all their representatives. I was sad to see that at the time of the flag raising there was also a municipal council meeting going on, but one of the councillors was able to come out briefly to say a couple of words. I was there, able to support the Taber equality society as an MLA even though I had to drive about two, three hours down to Taber.

I was very disappointed that the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner was not present. I don't know if he was busy that day or if he wasn't in town or if he was stuck in Edmonton. But I was really proud to be there to stand with his community and to show that no matter who you are in this province, you're respected by this side of the House, by this government, and this party. I don't know what the UCP stands for. I don't know what the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner stands for, but I don't think he stands with his constituents when it comes to this exact moment. I hope to see him this summer when the Taber equality society raises their pride flag above the provincial building in Taber. I hope to see him there.

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

11:40

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise under 29(2)(a) and address the member's comments on the throne speech. Now, the member made reference to a co-operative rather than competitive system of business, and I think that's an important comparison and an important distinction. I would ask the hon. member, for the people in your riding of Cardston-Taber-Warner, when you address them or if you've talked to them about this difference, for your opinion on which method of business seems to serve your constituents better in terms of being able to look after their families, in terms of being able to have jobs, and even in terms of generating tax revenue for local, municipal, and federal governments to provide much-needed public services, infrastructure, social services, all those types of things, because I think that was an important issue that the hon. member raised. I would invite him to talk about that difference between a co-operative rather than competitive system of business.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It was a very good question that was asked. It was a question that was talking specifically about the throne speech. [interjection]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you. This is something that goes back to maybe some comments that were made by our hon. leader. He was talking about the difference between Saskatchewan and Alberta, and one of the differences – I was talking to some of the MLAs from Saskatchewan. They were talking about the potash in Saskatchewan.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the throne speech?

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 5

An Act to Strengthen Financial Security for Persons with Disabilities

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 5, An Act to Strengthen Financial Security for Persons with Disabilities.

Madam Speaker, all Albertans should be able to plan for their children's future. This legislation amends the AISH Act and the AISH general regulation so Albertans can establish trusts for family members and loved ones who are receiving AISH benefits without affecting their AISH eligibility.

The AISH program, assured income for the severely handicapped, provides financial and health-related benefits to support almost 60,000 adults with a disability. AISH benefits help people with their daily needs and with living as independently as possible. This program is about much more than a monthly living allowance. AISH includes significant benefits, including health benefits, that cover the cost of dental, optical, and prescription drugs as well as covering some of the costs of child care. Madam Speaker, AISH provides the support people need on a daily basis to live meaningful and engaged lives.

AISH should not prevent Albertans from saving for their future. People with disabilities should have the same opportunity for financial stability as other Albertans, and many Albertans have told us that. People across the province reached out to us and said that Albertans with disabilities should have equal access to financial security, and we are listening and taking action. Under Bill 5 Albertans will be better able to plan for their children's future. They can help ensure that their children or loved ones are taken care of. This legislation will ensure that people with disabilities have access to funds for continued care and quality of life. It will ensure that people remain eligible for the AISH program without having to deplete their trusts, and AISH clients will have time to invest unexpected payments such as an inheritance in an exempt asset without losing their benefits.

For decades the previous government's regressive policies were designed to keep people off AISH. We are working to ensure Albertans have clear access to the supports they need. We have invested \$188 million in the AISH program and are working to create a shorter, simpler, and more accessible application form, developing user-friendly how-to guides to help Albertans apply for AISH, and setting clear standards to ensure the program works for Albertans.

Our government believes in the power of collaboration. Last year our colleague the MLA for Calgary-Currie met with self-advocates and families of people with disabilities and heard their concerns. In response, he championed changes to the AISH Act with a private member's bill introduced last fall. His bill did not make it to final reading, but he highlighted the importance of the issue and a lack of fairness in the system that needs to be corrected.

He was supported by Inclusion Alberta, an organization that advocates on behalf of children and adults with developmental disabilities. Inclusion Alberta started a petition, and our

government heard from more than 3,400 Albertans asking for changes to the AISH Act. We are taking action. As the Minister of Community and Social Services I am honoured to say that Albertans are at the heart of all of our ministry's programs, and with Bill 5 we are putting Albertans first.

Alberta is one of the few jurisdictions that doesn't have explicit exemptions for trusts for people with disabilities. Under the current legislation an AISH recipient could lose their eligibility as the result of an inheritance. This is not right. As I said earlier, all Albertans want to have peace of mind and ensure that their children or loved ones are taken care of no matter their financial situation. They want to have the option to leave behind their personal financial resources and other assets, the things they have worked for throughout their lives, to support the standard of living of a loved one with a disability and to be able to do so when unexpected costs or expenses arise. Most importantly, they want to be able to do this without jeopardizing their loved one's eligibility for the AISH program.

We heard from Albertans loud and clear on this issue, and we are taking action. Two changes are proposed in this bill. First, Bill 5 amends the AISH Act to ensure that trusts are exempt as an asset when determining eligibility for the AISH program. Secondly, there will now be a one-year grace period, if someone receives a large payment such as an inheritance, to invest the payment into an exempt asset. This grace period will allow time to make a thoughtful decision and plan for their future. People will now have time to seek advice and make good choices about how to invest their assets, and parents and guardians will be able to make thoughtful decisions and plan for the long-term care of their children and loved ones who have disabilities. AISH recipients will not have to deplete their trusts to continue to receive benefits.

Discretionary trusts were allowed until the previous government prohibited them in the 1990s. This was a significant penalty on families and individuals looking to prepare for their future. With this legislation families can now help provide for the long-term care of a loved one. These changes allow more flexibility to plan for the future while remaining accountable. Bill 5 will allow for the exemption of discretionary and nondiscretionary trusts as an asset in which an applicant, client, or cohabiting partner is a beneficiary. Should the bill pass, a client will be able to be a beneficiary of a trust of any value, in addition to the current \$100,000 nonexempt asset limit, without affecting their eligibility for the AISH program.

11:50

Bill 5 also includes an amendment that will temporarily exempt as an asset payments that are not considered income by the AISH program and a one-year grace period to place those funds into an exempt asset. This could include an inheritance or gifts. The grace period ensures AISH recipients will not be penalized and potentially lose AISH eligibility if they receive a lump-sum payment that puts them over the \$100,000 nonexempt asset limit, and it provides the time for people and their families to make long-term financial plans without pressure that they will become ineligible for the AISH program in the meantime. Community and Social Services will advise Albertans affected by this change to consult professional estate planners and legal experts for advice and direction on how to make the best choice to plan for their long-term needs.

Madam Speaker, Bill 5 is about fairness, and our government has committed to protect vulnerable Albertans and ensure they are treated fairly. I'm committed to ensuring that people who receive support from the AISH program have the best system possible to meet their needs. For this to happen, we need to ensure that more emphasis is on being fair to all Albertans and especially to people who receive our services.

As I mentioned earlier, we are committed to making real changes that will help improve the lives of Albertans with disabilities and their families. We are taking significant action, including moving forward on the first advocate for persons with disabilities in Alberta's history, which we will begin recruitment for this spring. We have made changes to the service dog regulation to increase access for persons with disabilities. We have stopped previous government policies that the community felt were regressive and disrespectful, including the persons with developmental disabilities safety standard and the supports intensity scale.

We are currently engaged with the community to work on a review of the PDD program. We have increased funding to PDD and AISH to ensure Albertans get the supports they need. We have released the AISH action plan to make AISH more user friendly and accessible instead of trying to keep Albertans off the program, like the previous government did. We have worked openly and collaboratively with self-advocates, families, workers, and service providers, and we have heard loud and clear from the community: Nothing about Us without Us. We have and will continue to honour this and work with the community to make improvements together.

Bill 5 is an important step forward. We have garnered support from a wide array of stakeholders, including those 3,400 Albertans who signed Inclusion Alberta's petition: Frances Harley, mother of a disabled daughter; Joan Lee, CEO of the Vecova Centre for Disability Services and Research; Bruce Uditsky, father of a son with disabilities and head of Inclusion Alberta; Lesley and Sherwin Tabler; Donna Desjardins of Inclusion St. Paul; Tina Trigg, mother of a disabled daughter and board member with Inclusion Alberta.

Madam Speaker, Bill 5 will make life better for Albertans and will help ensure that Albertans with disabilities are treated fairly, and it will support families that are planning for their children's future. I want to thank all of the self-advocates, families, and the staff that advocated for these important changes. I encourage all members of the Assembly to support this important bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 5 this morning with the limited time that we have left before we rise here at noon, but I will try to make the most of the time that we have available as we speak to Bill 5 and some of the important things that the minister has outlined. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak in favour of Bill 5, An Act to Strengthen Financial Security for Persons with Disabilities. [interjection] It's okay. You can go ahead if you want.

It's not all that often that in this Chamber we find such common cause, but I think that we've done that with Bill 5. It has been said that teamwork makes the dream work, and I think that we will be able to support such a valuable piece of legislation with respect to people with disabilities in our province.

In fact, Madam Speaker, this piece of legislation is long overdue. It's a long-overdue measure to ensure that Albertans living with disabilities are not unfairly penalized for inheriting assets or other gifts from family members, folks who would like to have some sense of peace of mind when it comes to caring for the needs of their loved ones without any concern or fear of having their AISH benefits clawed back.

All members of this Assembly, regardless of their political stripe, recognize the amazing contribution that individuals with disabilities make to our great province, and they also recognize that the government does have a role in caring for those vulnerable

populations. Persons with disabilities should not be given fewer financial protections than those without disabilities in terms of inheritance, and parents leaving their children their hard-earned money should not have to worry about those funds being clawed back and, in fact, those funds creating harm to their child as they may risk losing their much-needed AISH support.

I want to take just a brief moment to commend my colleague from across the aisle, the Member for Calgary-Currie, for originally bringing this legislation forward in his private member's bill. I know that he worked incredibly hard on outreach on portions of this legislation as well as on outreach to all members of the Assembly to try and see that piece of legislation passed in its previous form. I know that I have personally heard from many stakeholders that have been advocating for this issue and about the great deal of time that they've spent trying to get this particular issue across the line. I'm pleased that it's finally being addressed.

Now, there are a number of situations inside this piece of legislation that I think require some additional discussion and more robust debate. I don't think that we're going to have time for that this morning. However, I hope that throughout other stages of the legislation we will be able to address some of those things, in particular around some of the issues with respect to discretionary trusts and nondiscretionary trusts and if the government has addressed some of the potential concerns that we have heard from

stakeholders, particularly around nondiscretionary trusts. Some of the issues that can be found in the legislation with respect to what will be exempt and what won't be exempt, the assets and how that would be applied to assets, I think will be important for some further discussion.

As well, perhaps we should be asking ourselves if there are areas where people receiving AISH supports can receive some income from work that they might require and if they should in fact be able to benefit from the trust on a monthly basis or not. I think it's an important discussion that we have here in this Chamber.

I look forward to continuing to support this legislation. In that support, it does mean that we need to ask some important questions and about some checks and balances, making sure that they're in place. But, on balance, I think that this is a step that's long overdue, and I look forward to supporting it. I look forward to hearing from the minister on some of the questions that we have as we continue the debate, but in the name of time for this morning I'll be happy to keep my remarks to this point now.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the Assembly will now stand adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:59 a.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers.....	349
Orders of the Day	349
Government Motions	
Standing Committee on Legislative Offices	349
Provincial Fiscal Policies.....	349
Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor’s Speech	355
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 5 An Act to Strengthen Financial Security for Persons with Disabilities	360

Alberta Hansard is available online at www.assembly.ab.ca

For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875