



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 10, 2018

Day 14

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

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Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
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Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawthorn (NDP)
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
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Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (NDP)
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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Conklin
Vacant, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake

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

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 10, 2018

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us be grateful for that which unites us. Let us be understanding of that which sets us apart. Let us always be mindful that we are here to address and serve the needs of others first.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

Ms Jabbour: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce through you to the Assembly some special guests of yours that are seated in the Speaker's gallery who will be at a special screening of *Indian Horse* tonight at the Pehonan Theatre in the Edmonton Federal Building. The film *Indian Horse* is based on the book by the same name by Canadian author Richard Wagamese about the residential school experience in this country.

First, I'd like to introduce Edna Manitowabi, who plays a grandmother and elder in the film but who is also professor emeritus at Trent University, specializing in courses pertaining to indigenous culture and knowledge. As well, we have an Alberta actor from Frog Lake, Tristen Marty-Pahtaykan, who in addition to his role in *Indian Horse* has continued to develop his career on the national-international stage. Accompanying Tristen are his friends and family, Lyle Pahtaykan, Donald Cross, and Sharon Cross. I'd also like to introduce Carrie Wolfe, whose work with the Speaker's office made this screening tonight possible. I'd like to invite all of you to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, and thank you for coming.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a former constituent of mine, Mr. John Cowan. John lived in Alberta for 23 years and is currently working in the technology industry in Winnipeg. John is the oldest brother of one of our pages, Jordan Cowan, and is here today to see her in action. I would ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly guests here today from the Canadian Obesity Network: Dr. Arya M. Sharma, scientific director; Dr. Ximena Ramos Salas, managing director; Marty Enokson, chair of the public engagement committee; and Alex Schwarzer, also on the public engagement committee. The Canadian Obesity Network is Canada's leading obesity organization and is made up of health care professionals, researchers, policy-makers, and people with an interest in obesity. I want to thank them for all of their work and ask them to now please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the House several members of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta. They work as individuals in a pivotal mental and physical health well-being role. It's my pleasure to introduce addiction counsellors Katie Borek and Sheri MacMillan – maybe they can stand while I introduce them so people can recognize them – child life specialist Melanie DeCillia, mental health therapist Scott MacDougall, residence counsellor Jackson Boikai, and mental health therapist Renata Logan. Please welcome them to the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Mr. Kris Barker. Kris is a resident of Edmonton-Gold Bar and a passionate Conservative. Mr. Barker has served our community and our country as a decorated soldier, having served for 12 years in our military, including three overseas tours in Bosnia and Afghanistan, where at one point he was injured on our behalf. I'm glad he's on our side and glad he could join us today. I would ask Corporal Barker, retired, to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services and Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you some dedicated lab assistants and lab technologists, all of whom are members of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta. Laboratory services impact over 70 per cent of health care decisions. These health care professionals work around the clock to provide accurate and timely results vital to the medical care of Albertans. I'd ask Elvira, Neena, Rutchel, Ayed, Yvonne, Rosemary, Heather, and Shannon to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions this afternoon. It is my pleasure to introduce to you some more members from the Health Sciences Association of Alberta. HSAA represents roughly 25,000 caring health care professionals from across the province, working hard every day to keep all Albertans safe and healthy. We value your contribution and thank you for your service. I'd now ask Leanne, Nancy, Shannon, Neil, Donna, Nicole, Laurel, Sarah, Susan, and another Nicole to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms Payne: For my second introduction I'd also like to introduce some of Alberta's dental hygienists during Oral Health Month. They educate and empower Albertans of all ages to take good care of their mouths, teeth, and gums to help benefit their overall physical and mental well-being. Thank you to all the dental hygienists who help us to keep our teeth and gums healthy and clean so we can enjoy a better smile and improved quality of life. I'd now invite Margo, Alysha, Jacqueline, Marthe, Kelly, and Paulette from the College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Ken Goosen of GlobalFest. GlobalFest is Calgary's second-largest festival, after Stampede, and brings thousands of people to my riding of Calgary-East every year for incredible fireworks displays and multicultural performances. GlobalFest also works throughout the year providing human rights education and arts programming in Calgary and around Alberta. If Mr. Goosen could rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have three introductions. The first is a group who are here from the Health Sciences Association of Alberta. We are committed to assisting EMS with resource issues through a greater emphasis on paramedic integration, community-based care, and reduced wait times for EMS crews in emergency rooms. These folks are certainly partners in making that work happen, so thank you for your advocacy and partnership in making life better for Albertans. I'd invite Nathaniel, Karli, Deanna, Brian, Michael, Jason, D.J., Marlys, and Shawn to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, my second of the three introductions today is Violet Kully and her family, who are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that Violet rise while I talk about her for a moment. She is turning 85 today. Show it off, Violet. She is a mother of three and baba to five. I have the pleasure of working with her favourite daughter-in-law, Tracy. She hails from the New Kiev, Mundare area, where she spent 73 years farmsteading. Violet has a huge heart and spent over 50 years of her life giving back to the community through volunteerism, contributing to local and provincial hospital auxiliaries, and has been a devoted volunteer, giving countless hours to those in need and visiting them in hospital. She's also the director and president of St. Basil's Ukrainian women's church league, and she rolls some of the best holubtsi there. I'd invite Violet – thank you for standing – and, please, your family as well to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

1:40

My final introduction today, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Kaelyn Anderson, who is seated in the members' gallery. Kaelyn as well please rise. You are a fierce young activist who's passionate about indigenous and women's rights. She comes from a political family on both sides. Her kokum was a member of Indian Rights for Indian Women, which fought for women to regain their treaty rights. She plans on doing gender studies and native studies at the University of Alberta. I'd invite her to receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, any other guests today? The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members some members of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta executive board and staff. HSAA represents approximately 240 different health sciences disciplines, many of whom are obviously here in the House today. Through your hard work and commitment HSAA continues to support a large community of front-line workers, who provide essential services for all Albertans across the province. Thank you for your advocacy and your partnership. I would like to invite Mike,

Trudy, and Jerry to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Obesity

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many people who know me have recognized that I've lost a considerable amount of weight over the last year. Legislature security staff joke with me that I'm one of very few MLAs to have actually lost weight being an MLA. We have a good laugh about it.

However, Mr. Speaker, obesity in Alberta is not a laughing matter. There are approximately 648,500 adults living with obesity in this province. Individuals with obesity experience weight bias and discrimination in a number of ways. This discrimination impacts the health and well-being of individuals with obesity beyond any physical obesity-related impairments that they may have. Sixty-three per cent of children with obesity face a higher risk of being bullied, 54 per cent of adults with obesity report being stigmatized in their workplace, and 64 per cent of adults with obesity report experiencing weight bias from health care professionals themselves.

The World Health Organization recognized obesity as a disease when it was established in 1948. However, the same cannot be said of all different orders of government in Canada. For example, anti obesity medications are not covered by provincial public drug benefit programs or any of the federal public drug benefit programs. The number of bariatric surgeries in Alberta has continued to rise steadily in the last six years. However, it's still the case that not everyone who is eligible for this surgery is able to access it.

Mr. Speaker, we can all agree that we need to focus on addressing this very important issue, and for that reason I invited staff and community members of the Canadian Obesity Network here today to the Legislature. I'm counting on all members of this Assembly to become informed on this issue and to meet with their constituents who have the experience of living with obesity. By working together we can help the many Albertans who need help on this matter.

Thank you.

Humboldt Broncos Bus Crash

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, it's with a heavy heart that I spend a few minutes talking about the tragedy in Saskatchewan. As we all know, late Friday night a bus carrying the Humboldt Broncos was involved in a horrific crash. Coaches, staff, and players lost their lives pursuing a dream they all shared.

As any western Canadian knows, it isn't uncommon for kids and parents to travel hundreds of kilometres to get to hockey games during the long winter season. Hockey is a sport that unites us, from peewee to the juniors to the NHL and the Olympics. Hockey brings us together like nothing else. It is a source of community, of national pride. For any of us here who have ever spent any time in a locker room or on those long bus trips to the next game, those are memories that remain indelible in our minds forever. You become as close as family to the players, to the coaches, and to the parents that you are fortunate enough to know as billets. Tragically, these young lives were taken away far too soon.

A community and a province now mourns. Humboldt is a small town, like so many others dotting the prairies, a farming community

that loves its junior team. This tragedy hits very close to home for me personally as a father, a volunteer firefighter, and someone who is deeply rooted in his community. Hopes and dreams ended in an instant on Friday night. Lives are forever shattered, and it will take time to heal the deep wounds. Mr. Speaker, I'm heartened by the outpouring of support from people across North America and beyond, from our own Premier to the Prime Minister to the President of the United States. We all share the community's grief. This week we are all Humboldt strong.

Thank you.

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

Holocaust Remembrance Day

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to recognize Yom ha-Shoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, this year to be recognized on April 12. The Holocaust was one of the most shocking and horrible parts of our history as humanity, and to forget the suffering and death inflicted on the Jewish people would be dishonouring their memory. In commemorating Holocaust Remembrance Day, we remember not only those of the Jewish faith that died but the many others who died during that conflict because of their beliefs, race, disabilities, or sexual orientation.

We have to remember that the Holocaust did not begin with murder. It started with words, with a narrative of hatred that allowed the political leaders of the time to encourage their citizens to attack fellow citizens. Respect and tolerance are a nonnegotiable need for peaceful society today.

The Jewish community in Alberta is a vital and active part of our society. The countless contributions they have made to our communities, to our province, and to our way of life are known and appreciated by all of us. I have had the privilege of getting to know Holocaust survivors in my riding and listen to their personal stories. They are an inspiration for all of us. Holocaust Remembrance Day is being commemorated in my constituency at the Calgary Jewish Centre and Beth Tzedec synagogue.

By staying vigilant against racism, violence, hatred, and persecution, we honour those who suffered and were lost. May their memory live forever through our actions and thoughts, and may such a tragedy never be repeated.

Thank you.

Rural Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, over the years several significant reports have been conducted on the administrative and operational problems in the rural ambulance system, including that of the Health Quality Council of Alberta, the Rural Health Services Review Committee, the Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the central Alberta municipalities group, and the southern paramedics that produced the suburban-rural EMS deployment review. Common operational problems in each report included repeated complaints of ambulances and paramedics needlessly being tied up for hours in emergency departments; critical time wasted on nonemergency, taxilike transfers; flexing of units into other communities, leaving no local coverage; units not being returned to their home regions; and faulty centralized dispatch protocols.

Despite years of the very same complaints these same issues continue to plague the system today. Rural residents, elected officials, EMS paramedics, and patients across Alberta continue to feel the impact and are extremely worried about this failed system. In fact, in the fall of 2017 a number of Alberta paramedics came to

the Legislature to seek remedies to these obvious operational problems, with no positive results.

Mr. Speaker, the solutions are known. These problems are easily fixed. It's time the minister admitted that resolving these operational problems is the very key to solving this broken ambulance system. It's time we discontinued holding ambulances and paramedics in our ERs and set up instead a proper receiving system. It's time to ensure we stop the practice, where possible, of using ambulances as taxis. For rural areas it's time to give our paramedics the resources they need, stop the practice of using rural ambulances for nonemergency transfers, and ensure that rural ambulances are released from emergency rooms within no more than an hour and that they are not flexed elsewhere but instead are mandatorily returned to their home regions.

These are the solutions that United Conservatives will continue to advocate for, Mr. Speaker. We will fight tirelessly to put Albertans first and fix these crucial ambulance problems once and for all.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Trans Mountain Pipeline Construction Suspension

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, why did the NDP government lift its wine boycott in British Columbia even after the New Democrat allies in Victoria doubled down in the fight against Kinder Morgan?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We temporarily lifted the wine ban because the government of British Columbia agreed with the terms that we set out with regard to controlling the product that was in our pipelines. We've made it very clear, the Premier has made it very clear that this is a temporary lift. We will continue to pressure.

We have three fronts that we're working on, Mr. Speaker. One, of course, is making sure that we protect the project, that needs to move forward in the national interest. If it comes to it, we will buy that pipeline and we will make sure that it gets built. Two, we're fighting in court, and we will continue to do so. Three, the people of British Columbia: the government of British Columbia has caused pain to Alberta families, and if we have to, we'll do the same in British Columbia.

1:50

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, if the government of British Columbia agreed that they didn't have jurisdiction to stop the pipeline, why did Kinder Morgan just suspend the pipeline? Yet again this NDP government got it completely wrong, fumbling the ball from the beginning.

Next question, Mr. Speaker. Why did the Premier declare victory on the Kinder Morgan pipeline last week after one legal decision with many more yet to come? Why did she declare victory when the pipeline is now on life-support?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, let me put the record very clear. The Premier has said that we will do whatever it takes to get this pipeline built. Don't count Alberta out. I know that the members opposite keep trying to do that. They keep trying to say that this is destined for failure, but it's not.

We have three fronts at our disposal. Those include the people of British Columbia. Their government has caused pain to Alberta

families. We can certainly do the same, and we've put a bill on the Order Paper that enables us to do that if it comes to that. We're fighting in court, and at every turn we have won. We also are willing to give industry that confidence. If it comes to it, we will buy this pipeline. We are moving forward, full stop. We call on the federal government to do the same.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, they're moving backward, full stop. Maybe the Deputy Premier didn't get the news release on Sunday, but the pipeline project has been suspended. Our critical economic future is hanging by a thread thanks in part to the incompetence of this government. I ask again: why did the Premier tell this House just a week ago today that there was a, quote, decisive victory in the fight for the pipeline just five days before it was put on life-support?

Ms Hoffman: Well, Mr. Speaker, 14 times we've gone to court, and 14 times we've won. Yes, the Houston investors have made a decision that they've announced will come into effect at the end of May. That definitely sends a really clear sign to the people of Canada that this project is at risk. That's why we will not back down. That's why we're investing and making sure that this pipeline goes forward. If it means that we have to buy the pipeline and we have to move it forward ourselves, we will because this matters to the people of Alberta more than the petty politics of the members of the opposition.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Provincial Response to Pipeline Opposition

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it sounds more and more like the NDP is living on an alternative planet here. The pipeline was suspended on Sunday. These 14 so-called court victories are immaterial to the opponent's strategy of death by delay, of creating uncertainty, which led to Sunday's disastrous announcement. So what specifically, not general, vague talking points, specifically, is the government of Alberta calling on the federal government to do to ensure the construction of the Kinder Morgan pipeline?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've said it before, and I'll say it again. We have three tools at our disposal. One is making the people of British Columbia feel the economic pain that their government is making the people of Alberta feel. We don't want to move forward with that. Of course, we want our pipeline to go forward, we want affordable gas prices for the people of British Columbia, but we certainly have the ability to slow down the taps. We will after we consider the bill on the Order Paper. If it comes to it, we will do that, and we would call on the federal government to support us in that. Two, we've gone to court. We've taken intervenor status. We call on the federal government to support us in that. Three, we will take a public interest. We will buy that pipeline if that's what it comes to, Mr. Speaker, and of course we call on the federal government to do that. They also have other tools at their disposal, including some financial implications to the people of British Columbia, and we compel them to use those as well.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier said that she has called on the federal government to withhold funding from B.C. for the pan-Canadian climate framework. That's a whopping \$30 million. But a week ago Justin Trudeau's Alberta Minister Sohi

signed a \$4.1 billion cheque for the Horgan New Democrats for infrastructure. Will this government agree with me that that money should be withheld from the B.C. government until the pipeline is built?

Ms Hoffman: We will defend Alberta and the working people of western Canada, Mr. Speaker. Now that the energy industry needs Ottawa to step up, we call on them to act. Of course, members opposite know a lot about Ottawa ragging the puck. Their leader sat in the House of Commons for about two decades and barely even mentioned the pipeline. The Harper government never came close to building a pipeline to tidewater. We are closer than we have ever been, and we will not relent. We will move forward on those three fronts and call on the federal government to join us.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we're closer than we've ever been to the prospect of no pipeline, with their ally Justin Trudeau cancelling Northern Gateway and killing Energy East, surrendering to Barack Obama on Trans Mountain, and now doing precisely nothing on Trans Mountain. Again I ask: will the government call on Prime Minister Trudeau to withhold the \$4.1 billion in infrastructure payments to B.C. unless this \$7 billion of private infrastructure funding is allowed to complete the Kinder Morgan pipeline? Will they join with me in calling on the federal government to do that?

Ms Hoffman: I know that the member opposite wants to spend his time in Ottawa, or so it appears, because all of his actions here are called on Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, we have three tools in Alberta's tool box, and we are using them. First, we have the ability to bring on some economic consequences to the people of British Columbia because they've done exactly that to the people of Alberta. Second, we are fighting in court, and every time we've gone to court, we have won on behalf of Albertans. Third, we will invest in the project if that's what it comes to. We call on the federal government to use those same tools. They have them. They have a lot of tools in their tool box. You had them when you were in Ottawa. I wish you would have used them then.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, apparently she didn't hear the president of Kinder Morgan say that the company cannot litigate its way to building a pipeline in the context of this uncertainty.

Federal Response to Pipeline Opposition

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government's strategy has been to hitch its wagon to Justin Trudeau and not question a single thing that the federal government has done. They haven't questioned cancelling Northern Gateway, killing Energy East, surrendering on Keystone, or Bill C-69, which will kill the prospect of any future pipeline approval. Will the government now join with me in asking the federal government to withdraw the antipipeline federal Bill C-69?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, we have tools within our means, and we are certainly using those. We call on the federal government to use them as well. We believe in the three fronts that we're fighting this on. Of course, court is one. We have to call on the courts to help us move forward through this legal process. We compel the federal government to join us in those calls in court. Two, we have economic implications that can be done to the government of

British Columbia and the people of British Columbia if it comes to that. We don't want to do that, but they have had the same implications on the people of Alberta. That's why we need to make sure that these tools are at our disposal. Three, Mr. Speaker, nothing will stand in our way. We need to get this pipeline built. The people of Alberta have told us that, and that's why we'll move forward with public investment if that's what it comes to.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
First supplemental.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a week ago the Trudeau government signed an agreement to transfer \$4.1 billion, discretionary dollars, to B.C.'s Horgan government for infrastructure. Does the Deputy Premier think that that reflects seriousness on the part of the Trudeau government to get Kinder Morgan built, or does she believe that the federal government should have made construction of the pipeline a condition of that infrastructure agreement with the Horgan government?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, in terms of what we're doing to move forward in getting this pipeline, because that needs to be our number one call, we're making sure that we're acting on these three fronts. Of course, later we will be introducing legislation that will enable us to increase the price at the pump if that's what it comes to. This is a natural consequence of impacting jobs in Alberta, hurting Alberta families. I don't think that if I lived in British Columbia and knew that that was coming down the road, I'd be very happy with my government for putting Alberta in a position where they had to do that. Of course, there are other financial measures that the federal government can take, and we call on them to consider doing that. We think it's important that the national interest move forward and that they be held to account.

Mr. Kenney: Turning off the taps, Mr. Speaker. That's a great idea. I wonder where they came up with that one.

Let me ask once again. The federal government just signed an agreement a few days ago to transfer 4 billion tax dollars to B.C. for infrastructure. This is not actually a difficult question. The government here says that they'll do anything to fight for this pipeline. Here's something: how about calling on the federal government to pull that money back until the pipeline is completed?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly have called on the federal government to take financial measures to make sure that the British Columbia government knows that this is a serious project in the national interest. This isn't just about a project that's going to help Alberta families; it's going to help British Columbia families and families across our country. We certainly do call on the federal government to act on that front.

That isn't the only front, Mr. Speaker. We also call on them to make sure that they're supporting us in our legal actions as we move forward as well as working with us to make sure that if it takes public investment to make this project happen, they step up and join us. They have a number of tools at their disposal. But no matter what they do, this government will fight for that pipeline.

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:00 Pipeline Development

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in estimates the Minister of Energy responded to questions about the future of Kinder Morgan

by saying that Alberta only needs two of the three major pipeline projects currently happening to get built. But let's be clear. The Trans Mountain expansion, the Enbridge line 3 expansion, and Keystone XL are all crucially important – and we believe that in the Alberta Party caucus – but only one of them connects to Canadian tidewater. To the Minister of Energy: why are you hedging your bets on pipeline construction now, or would you like to correct your comment?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I'll start, and perhaps my colleague the Minister of Finance will help me as well. When I made that comment about the two out of three pipelines, that's just really a mathematical exercise of the capacity, but it doesn't address the strategic focus which we have. We know that we need more markets in Asia, and we know that strategically the Trans Mountain pipeline is extremely important. So it's kind of two different things, but one is just on the capacity issue itself. We know that two out of three will work, but strategically we need Trans Mountain.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fraser: Assuming the government is still committed to getting all three pipelines built, the exchange yesterday revealed something important. We have asked the government about what their backup plan is for a path to balance without the increased revenue from pipelines. They refused to answer but made it clear yesterday that at least they've considered the possibility of not all three projects getting completed. Clearly, you have an idea of what these pipelines are losing for your budget and the bottom line for Albertans. To the same minister: will you be open and transparent and share that information in this House?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I just have to turn to page 104 in our budget book, our fiscal plan. You can read there the importance of market access, and you can see where the pipelines and the capacities take away the oil and bitumen from Alberta and get it either to tidewater or down to the United States and the Gulf coast. Of course, our path to balance is not contingent upon the revenue from all of these pipelines, but we're confident they all will be built.

Mr. Fraser: The Premier and the Deputy Premier have talked about buying an equity stake in Trans Mountain. Today she said that if Kinder Morgan decided not to continue the project after May 31, she would have the province buy it outright, which is a good idea if there's a proper return on investment for Albertans. The problem is that we have no idea what the final price tag of that project is. To the Minister of Energy: how can your government commit to buying this pipeline when you don't even know the full cost, and if you do know, will you table that information in this House?

Ms Hoffman: What we know, Mr. Speaker, is that tens of thousands of jobs and millions of dollars of public interest are at stake if this project does not go forward. Albertans have been very clear: don't take no for an answer. That's what our Premier is doing. She's stepping up. She's making sure that we have the three fronts that we are fighting on: one, ensuring that British Columbia knows the impacts of saying no; two, making sure that we pursue this through the courts as a partner; and three, making sure that if it comes to

having a public stake in this so that we can push forward the way that investors should and could that we have the ability to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

French Language and Francophone Education

Ms McKittrick: Merci, M. le Président. The federal government recently announced a new action plan on official languages. One of the key strategies is to support bilingualism through investing in second-language teacher recruitment strategies. I know from my discussion with Canadian Parents for French and many school trustees and administrators that there is a challenge in the ability to recruit French immersion and French as a second language teachers in Alberta, especially in rural areas. To the Minister of Education: how are you going to make sure that increased federal supports for French immersion and French as a second language teacher recruitment benefit all Albertans who want their children to access these learning opportunities regardless of . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. Our government believes that every child in Alberta deserves a chance for success and a chance for francophone and French education regardless of where they live here in the province of Alberta, whether it's in a rural area or an urban area as well. We know as well that our francophone population here in the province has increased by more than 40 per cent in the last 20 years and that enrolment in francophone schools has gone up by more than 200 per cent during that same time. We're encouraged that the federal government is making an investment in francophone education across the country, and we just want to make sure that the federal government . . .

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

Ms McKittrick: Merci. The federal funding and action plan are helpful, but I was wondering: what action specifically is the Ministry of Education taking to support the desire of Albertan parents to have their children attend French immersion or FSL programs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. We have more than 240,000 self-identified francophone people here in the province of Alberta. It's growing very quickly. We are building a new curriculum in all subject areas and in all grade levels, and we're doing that in both official languages simultaneously and working together very closely with the francophone community. Some of the curriculum in this province is more than 30 years old. It's way overdue for an update, and it's way overdue to do it in both of our official languages. We're working very hard together with francophones across the province to make this happen.

Ms McKittrick: Alberta's conseils francophones also benefit from federal action strategies. I know that the minister had some very tough decisions to make in the capital plan for new school projects, so the two new schools announced for the francophone school boards are an indication of the importance the minister places on them. Again to the Minister of Education: given your interests what

are you doing to ensure that Alberta students can access francophone education?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we have worked very hard to ensure that we build schools. We have more than 200 school projects on the go across the province at this time. We've put more than a billion dollars into the education system that wouldn't have otherwise happened from the previous government. With these schools we are making sure that we meet the needs of francophone education and French immersion education every step of the way. It's a rapidly, exponentially growing part of our education and school population, and we will make sure that we meet the needs of francophone education here in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Recycling

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is a laggard in recycling, landfilling more tonnes per capita in this province than any other province in the country. Since China has notified the world that they'll no longer accept recyclables, it's urgent that we update our laws and further diversify our manufacturing economy and jobs. In other provinces there is provincially co-ordinated recycling, with costs borne by the industries that produce the packaging, called EPR, extended producer responsibility. To the minister: will you meet with the Recycling Council of Alberta and discuss the tremendous opportunities and environmental benefit of a more modern recycling program in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is quite right. There are a number of challenges associated with Alberta's recycling system as it is currently structured, and part of that has been amalgamating the Alberta Recycling Management Authority with the Used Oil Management Association so that we can get the governance right and we can make sure that we don't have too many agencies, boards, or commissions overseeing these matters.

As for the suggestion of extended producer responsibility, it's a good one. That is why, for example, we are consulting with the agricultural industry right now on an EPR model for agricultural plastics. I'll have more to say in the supplementals.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, it's been almost 10 years since this province committed in its environmental, Canada-wide action plan to EPR. Here we are 10 years later. It's policy that costs us nothing and brings up to \$70 million to this province. What gives, Madam Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is quite right. EPR is a good model. It is not the only model. We inherited a number of different structures and governances for recycling, so that's why in the first instance we're going to amalgamate those two associations and realize some efficiencies there. We're going to work with municipalities and hear from them. They have been writing to my office, and I think that's a good thing because it's a priority for them, too. We're going to make sure that we work with the Recycling Council. My office has met with them.

I'll assure the hon. member that I have a meeting with them I think in the coming week.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is the only province west of Quebec that places the full costs, risks, and liabilities associated with curbside recycling on the municipalities and the ratepayers. When will you provide the leadership that's needed with the AUMA and RMA, who have called repeatedly for this EPR, extended producer responsibility? When?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the hon. member is quite right that Alberta is a laggard when it comes to other provinces and territories, and the hon. member is quite right that this does place a burden on municipalities and that the province does need to step up with a more fulsome framework. That's why we need to do a bit more consultation. That's why we've moved forward with the agricultural plastics. We'll have more to say throughout 2018.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

2:10

Adoption Regulations

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Adoption is a gift that turns dreams into reality for adoptive parents, which is why I was so honoured to receive unanimous support for Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. We all agreed that it was important for government to put into place regulations around having both parents registered with formal adoption agencies in order to protect kids, amongst other things. The government never gave a timeline, during or after the debate, for these regulations. Could the minister please update the House on this timeline?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for bringing forward her private member's bill. Adoptive families play a critical role in providing safe, loving, caring homes for so many children who need one. We work closely with communities and families to support adoption when it's in the best interest of a child, and we will be engaging with young people, families, adoptive parents, and organizations on the adoption process and looking for improvements.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Minister, given that families are waiting anxiously to see this process of adoption eased through Bill 206 by putting their profiles online and given that families right now are waiting approximately two to three years for a child and given that adoption rates are dropping and wait-lists are creeping up, why is the government stopping Albertans from completing their families by not completing these regulations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are so thankful for the hundreds of families who step up for these kids and show us what community truly means. That means engaging with them, engaging with young people and with families and with organizations who are involved throughout the adoption process to talk about what needs to happen as we go forward and what improvement looks

like. Obviously, there are different thoughts on it, and we consider it very valuable always to do consultation and talk to Albertans about what they want to see as we make changes going forward.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Minister, given that adoption is an extraordinary gift to families that may not otherwise be able to have children and given that parents have been contacting my office, inquiring when Alberta is actually going to catch up to other provinces – we have jurisdictional information to share here with other provinces, Mr. Speaker – by allowing families to post their profiles online, Minister, when will you be proclaiming this legislation? Please explain the holdup.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly can say that we share her commitment to ensuring that the adoption process gives both children and parents the best possible outcomes, which is why after further consultation with adoptive parents and stakeholders I will be happy to provide an update to the member.

The Speaker: Calgary-Hays.

Federal Impact Assessment Act

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are rallying in Calgary today to support our natural resources. Rather than show support, the federal Liberals have introduced Bill C-69. If this legislation is passed, the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association has said, "It is difficult to imagine that a new major pipeline could be built in Canada under the impact assessment act, much less attract energy investment to Canada." To the Minister of Energy: have you read Bill C-69, and are you unhappy enough with it and what's in it to have complained to the federal government about it, and when did you do that, please?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I have reviewed the draft legislation as I did the discussion papers that came out last summer. That is why last summer we wrote to the federal government. The hon. Minister of Energy and I wrote jointly, expressing our concerns with what was in that draft document. We have further communicated with the federal government around things like timelines, the preplanning stage, the project list, and the application of the Alberta climate leadership plan with respect to the strategic assessments. There are some specific things that we would like to see in that legislation, and we're hopeful we will see them.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. I thank the minister for that answer.

Given that a report released yesterday by GMP FirstEnergy states, and I quote, we suspect we will see more oil sands divestitures from foreign companies in coming years, and given that we need this investment to fully develop our natural resources to provide jobs and fund services needed by Albertans, again to the minister: what is your government doing now to continue to fight off the damage that Bill C-69 will do?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is working closely to protect jobs today and for decades to come while ensuring that we have an appropriate environmental assessment process in place that instills both investor confidence and the confidence of Canadians. That is what that assessment process must grapple with at the federal level. We need to make sure as Albertans that it appropriately takes into account our regional planning exercises as well as the climate leadership plan, that the preplanning stage is accompanied by appropriate timelines. We got legislated timelines in the other pieces, and that was a victory on our part. There is more to do, and there's no question that we're doing it.

Mr. McIver: Well, now I have to thank the minister twice for those answers. Thank you, Minister.

Given the importance of the resource industry to Alberta's economy and given that Suncor's CEO recently said that other jurisdictions are doing much more to attract business and that Canada needs to also do much more to up its game, again to the minister: have you taken the advice of Suncor's CEO, and what will you do to raise our game?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that we have done to repair our international reputation is that we brought in an oil sands emissions limit, something that the Suncor CEO supported. We have also brought in a climate leadership plan with a number of different aspects, something that the Suncor CEO stood on the stage with the Premier and me on November 22, 2015, and supported.

Now, there is more to do. There is no question. There's a role for the federal government in terms of getting their environmental assessment right, in terms of getting their navigable waters and other environmental protection legislation in terms of finding the right sweet spot. We are making sure that Alberta is represented . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Carbon Levy and Small-business Costs

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, it comes as no surprise that this government is not making lives better with their crippling carbon tax. In fact, things are tough for school boards, nonprofits, households, and especially small businesses. In Provost a local businessman, Pak Wong, was recently featured in the local paper. The article outlined that the business is now paying \$900 in carbon tax each month this year. To the Minister of Energy: why did your department fail to do a proper socioeconomic study on how this punitive tax is going to affect small businesses . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Certainly, on October 31, 2016, we did release an economic impact assessment of the climate leadership plan as well as pipeline approvals. That was before the federal approval. In addition, what we did was that we ensured that we cut small-business taxes by a third. We exempted upstream oil and gas from the carbon levy until 2023. We also brought in a number of different incentives around methane reduction . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Taylor: Given that this business chose natural gas as both an ecological and economical way to run a cogeneration system and

given that the carbon tax hike has added to his cost of producing electricity, Minister, this business did everything right and is still being punished through your government's crippling tax. How do you expect Mr. Wong and other job creators to survive and continue to support Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as I indicated, small-business taxes have been cut by a third. That's some \$40 million in carbon levy revenues that have gone towards the small-business tax reduction. We also exempted small and medium-sized Alberta oil and gas facilities from the carbon levy, saving both large and small oil and gas companies who operate those facilities more than \$2.5 billion over that period. We have phased in the carbon competitiveness incentive, and the large emitters will get \$400 million of savings in the first three years of those regulations. We've provided between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion of free carbon offsets to companies investing in methane reduction technologies. And we've ensured that . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Taylor: The carbon tax hike of \$900 a month is greater than what he's getting in the business tax reduction.

Given that the recent increase to the minimum wage coupled with the increase in carbon tax have harmed this business's bottom line by approximately \$50,000 and given that he's already been forced to cut his business hours and given that these policies do nothing but harm small businesses, Minister, Mr. Wong would like to know: how do you think he's going to recover from those expenses and this major blow to his business?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would be pleased to follow up with the member and discuss his constituent's specific concerns at the conclusion of question period today.

2:20

Carbon Levy

Mr. Loewen: This government brought in the largest tax increase in Alberta's history, a tax increase that was not mentioned in their election campaign even though they produced budget forecasts but no mention of the income or expenditure of the carbon tax. This tax came in only months after the election. Can someone in government please come clean with Albertans, admit that they knew they were bringing in this tax during the election but would not tell Albertans, knowing that they would not have been elected if they had?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to respond to the misdirection on the other side. What we did say in the election platform was that we took climate change seriously and that we would take meaningful action to address that. In the months very shortly following our election, it was very clear that we were facing an opportunity during a very difficult downturn where we had to make a decision. We could either cut and move forward with the same strategies that the electorate had rejected or we could move forward, doing things differently, protecting essential public health services, taking climate change really seriously rather than occasionally paying lip service and occasionally funding films that fight against it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Given, Mr. Speaker, that that is true misdirection when the Deputy Premier gets up and says that it was in their campaign literature but actually wasn't and given that the Premier was all too happy to shake Trudeau's hand and agree to increase the carbon tax and thanked him on behalf of Albertans for his leadership in this regard, showing that when Trudeau says, "Tax," the Premier asks, "How high?" and given that we now have learned that the Premier has broken her promise that the carbon tax would not be used for general revenue, will the Premier just admit that the carbon tax was all about tax and had nothing to do with carbon?

Ms Hoffman: We did say in the platform that we would take meaningful action to address climate change, Mr. Speaker, and we stand by that. It became very clear that the best way to do so was through market mechanisms, something that the members of the opposition in the past have been big advocates of. They, in fact, had brought forward a price on carbon for the heavy emitters previously. It just wasn't one that would cause meaningful change or action in the province of Alberta. We moved on that in a way that we would take the opportunity to have additional revenue to support Albertans, to make sure that 30 per cent of our energy comes from renewables by 2030 and that we get our pipeline approvals, which we've gotten. Now we need to get that pipeline built.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the Premier calls the economic downturn an opportunity and given that the government has talked a lot about the economic pain that it will inflict on B.C. over the pipeline dispute and given that this economic pain will be created by increasing the price at the pumps in B.C., why is increasing the price that B.C. pays at the pumps called economic pain and the carbon tax raising the price at the pumps for Albertans called making life better?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We brought forward a price on carbon as part of our comprehensive climate leadership plan, and it was that plan that got the federal approvals to get our pipeline to tidewater. Now, the federal approvals are definitely a step in the right direction, but they need to be worth more than the paper they're written on. That's why we're fighting on three fronts, and we call on the federal government to join us in doing the exact same thing. They have tools in their tool box that, certainly, we could really use in getting this pipeline to tidewater, and we call on the federal government to join us in that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Cannabis Use in Affordable Housing

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The upcoming legalization of recreational cannabis use in Canada has prompted property managers to examine their policies about tenants' cannabis use for both recreational and medical purposes. One constituent who uses medical marijuana and is a Calgary Housing resident told me that the city of Calgary will prohibit pot use on their properties even for medical purposes. What will the Health minister do to ensure that my constituent can continue to receive quality-of-life benefits from medical marijuana in Calgary Housing?

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We do know that as we move forward with the federal decision to legalize cannabis, there are a number of decisions that need to be made. A number of

people throughout the province live in communal buildings, whether they be apartments, whether they be supportive housing. As we move forward, we'll be having those conversations with those individuals. We have given the landlords the mechanism to be able to make those decisions for the safety of other folks in the building, but if the hon. member would like to follow up with the specific concerns of that constituent, myself or the Minister of Seniors and Housing would be happy to speak with her.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms McPherson: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Given that there are tens of thousands of Albertans who rely on accessible housing, at least some of whom also rely on medical marijuana to address health issues and, doubtless, many more who might consider medical marijuana with their health care providers, what direction can the ministers of Health and Municipal Affairs provide to ensure that Calgary Housing Company and other municipally owned housing providers do not force patients to choose between their health and their homes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As we know, there are a number of complicated issues that have been raised around this file, and this is just one of them. Municipal governments are another order of government. Ultimately we have given them the power that they requested to make decisions in a number of areas, and we're going to respect their ability to make those decisions.

In terms of provincial housing facilities, Mr. Speaker, obviously we'll have to have those conversations, but we do need to consider not only the health and safety of individuals using cannabis but the health and safety of other individuals who live in the building.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms McPherson: Given that there are tens of thousands of Albertans who rely on housing in senior communities, supportive living, and long-term care and who may benefit from medical marijuana, what are you doing to ensure that they can use medical cannabis when living in housing provided by nonprofits and other organizations that are funded at least in part by provincial and other public money?

Ms Ganley: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, as we move forward, we do know that there are a number of conversations to be had around this issue. Ultimately buildings that are owned by folks other than the province: those private property locations are free to make their own decisions, and we're going to respect those decisions. Certainly, I understand that the federal government will have more to say on the legalization of products other than smoked products, but there is a very delicate balance to be struck here. There is the health of the individuals who seek the use of medical cannabis, but also there's the health of other individuals who live in the building who may not want to be exposed to smoke.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Management Plan

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, when the NDP announced the creation of the Castle provincial park in 2017, they promised off-highway vehicle, or OHV, users access to the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills area. Then just last month the minister released the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills draft plan, which appears to have eliminated

approximately 70 per cent of OHV trails. To the minister: how do you possibly expect the recreationists from the Castle combined with those already using the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills area to have proper use of facilities when the capacity has been so enormously reduced?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is quite right that when the Castle park was established, we found 1,800 stream crossings in that area, in the headwaters, where we have a number of species at risk, including some native trout, and 35 bridges for all those stream crossings. In the Porcupine Hills we found about 3,800 stream crossings. Clearly, we needed to undertake a planning exercise. There's no question about that. It was the member's own constituents who asked me for that planning exercise. I will never forget being at a town hall meeting – well, it was a community hall – with a whole bunch of people . . .

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

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, given that the draft plan announcement last month was poorly communicated, in my opinion, and has only allowed public consultation now for 30 days for the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills plan and given that the minister eventually extended the consultation period for the Castle provincial park, to the minister: why won't you overturn this ill-advised decision and hold a full series of open houses for proper public input, just like the Castle at the end, with at least a 90-day consultation period?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've been hearing from the hon. member's own constituents in the Porcupine Hills and in Livingstone. These are ranchers, these are people who have grazing lease permits, these are people who are private property owners, and they've asked us to undertake recreational planning. This has been years in the making. The member's own colleagues from the old legacy party, you know, studied this problem for a generation and did precisely nothing. It was his own constituents that begged us to get control over this. The runaway use of vacant public land was getting in the way of people's right to make a living, and that's not okay.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't sound like she wants to extend the limit.

Given that the latest plan for the Porcupine Hills would see OHV access reduced by nearly 70 per cent and given that there are only 30 days, less now today, the minister is once again failing to engage with Albertans. Will the minister admit that she made a mistake trying to bulldoze ahead with this ill-conceived plan before first consulting with the people being impacted?

Ms Phillips: Well, let me tell you about consultation, Mr. Speaker. Last summer I did a tour of the Porcupine Hills area with a number of the member's own constituents, and then I went into a community hall where there were about 50 people or more. I took my kids, in fact, and my kids devastated the snack table while I heard from his own constituents about how we needed more enforcement, better planning, and an actual thoughtful approach to recreation. It's his constituents that asked for this. I'm very confused as to why he doesn't want to represent them now.

2:30

Fisheries Management

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, families in my constituency will now have less access to fish for their families. On April 1 Dolberg Lake, a lake stocked with rainbow trout, changed from liberal harvest to quality harvest, essentially turning it into a trophy-only lake. The environment minister assures us that she understands the importance of fishing opportunities to communities. It should be expected, therefore, that if changes to the fisheries management objectives are being considered, the local community would have input into that decision. Minister, have you ensured that robust consultation with local stakeholders was performed before the regulations changed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, fisheries decisions get changed every year because we monitor the populations and we make science-based decisions. We make those decisions based on the work of the regional staff, the folks who are out there every day protecting the environment and making sure that there is something to fish and something to hunt. Around here, on this side of the House, we take the best advice coming from those hard-working folks in Environment and Parks and make sure that our rural and northern communities have access to those kinds of great tourism and other economic development opportunities.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, local families have relied on this lake for food and recreation for generations. They are now on the outside looking in. The lake has turned into a trophy lake. Given that the minister relies on a science-based approach to fisheries management and given that this change in the fisheries management objectives to quality harvest status would require extensive stakeholder engagement, will the minister reverse these regulations if it is shown that a robust consultation with local stakeholders was not properly performed to inform her science-based decision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess I shouldn't be surprised that from across the way there's sneering when we say the words "science based." There has got to be something to fish, there has got to be something to hunt, and that's why year over year we update our fishing and hunting regulations to make sure that they are appropriately managing the populations. We have in fact expanded walleye opportunities in many lakes after decades of mismanagement from the member's own colleagues, who did nothing. We have seen a recovery in some of those populations, and we've expanded the opportunities. We'll continue to do so.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, this is not a question with regard to population of fish in a lake. This is a lake stocked with rainbow trout.

Given that fish and wildlife officers are the individuals that Albertans rely on to patrol and enforce these regulations and given that these individuals are boots on the ground that can help inform the minister's decision and given that last week the minister said that she'd ensure stable, predictable funding for our fish and wildlife officers, could the minister please explain why this government has decided to close the Swan Hills fish and wildlife detachment, a detachment right in the centre of a very large fish and wildlife area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess it's a spend day coming from the members opposite, that it's fine to cut the budget if it's somewhere else but not in their own areas. The

fact of the matter is that we have robust enforcement personnel across the province between park rangers, conservation officers, fish and wildlife, and others. We have in fact changed the way that we operate some of our enforcement on the ground to make it more responsive to the needs of municipalities and others who have begged us for action on this file, and we will continue to do that work.

DynaLife Medical Labs

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, recruitment processes must be fair, open, and transparent for vendors to trust the system. Albertans must have confidence they're receiving value for their tax dollars. Part of convincing vendors and Albertans that a procurement was done properly is hiring an independent fairness adviser to offer an opinion that the process was defensible. To the Minister of Health: expanding on our previous DynaLife tablings, given that the appeal panel disagreed with the AHS adviser, who said that the process was fair, should the government release the adviser's opinion since they are defending that the process was fair?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be happy to get further details. I think the member is referring to the decision around the provincial lab system. [interjection] Thank you. Definitely, when we were elected, we made it very clear in our platform that we were going to end experiments in privatization in public health care. We're proud of the fact that we did that. We're proud of the fact that we're moving forward with a public lab here in Edmonton and that the members of the audience who are here from HSAA will be able to continue working in public health care rather than being privatized and outsourced, as the members opposite are proposing.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, given that she's ultimately accountable for Alberta Health Services, to the minister: would she order them to release the fairness opinion upon which it was publicly relying to prove that the procurement was fair, and thus has waived any potential privilege, or is she powerless to do what is right in regard to that DynaLife contract?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the fact that we took the opportunity, when we formed government, to act on the values that we ran on in that campaign, including moving forward on protecting these public jobs and public health care, something that we're incredibly proud of. After 50 years of medicare we're not going to let Conservatives across the aisle bully us into outsourcing and privatizing important public health services, including having the diagnostic tools we need for public professionals to be able to assess health care needs and for physicians and others to provide excellent public health care.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Health understand the inherent unfairness in Alberta Health Services saying that a process was fair yet refusing to order it to release an opinion that it touts as proving such fairness?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, does the opposition understand that this side of the House believes in and supports public health care? We think that it shouldn't be what's in your pocket that drives your health access; it should be your health needs. That's why we're incredibly proud to have a government that stood up instead of pushing for the deep cuts that members opposite are advocating for. We're building. We're building a public lab. We're building a Calgary cancer hospital. We're building in Fort McMurray, for

example, a long-term care facility that Conservatives promised and failed to fulfill. On this side of the House we're standing up, we're investing, and we're building the public health care services that we all deserve.

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

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Front-line EMS workers are a critical part of Alberta's response to an emergency. I've heard recently from the Health Sciences Association of Alberta that they are concerned about having enough staff and resources to ensure that EMS personnel are on the scene when Albertans need them most. To the Minister of Health: how is Budget 2018 supporting our EMS first responders?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his tireless advocacy for EMS and for the services that these members provide in our community. I want to celebrate the HSAA members who are here in the gallery today as well. Our government has heard their concerns, and we've acted. That's why we've budgeted \$456 million for ambulance services this year, an increase of \$23 million over what's forecasted for this current fiscal year. I certainly hope the members opposite will show some support for front-line service providers by voting for that budget.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is imperative that EMS workers are able to get to an emergency situation in a timely fashion. To the same minister: how will this funding help support EMS staff to respond quickly when there is an emergency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These new investments will go to support front-line services. Albertans will see more EMS stations, places to respond to emergencies, more ambulances on our roads, and more paramedics to staff them. The members opposite repeatedly ask about EMS supports in their individual communities while at the same time calling on us to make reckless cuts that would impact public health care. I'd ask them: which ambulances in your communities are you prepared to cut or leave people waiting? I'm not willing to do that.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when can front-line EMS staff start to see these changes take place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're working with Alberta Health Services to determine very specific locations for these investments. Last year EMS workers saw new power stretchers in AHS ambulances. This year they'll see mental health supports expanded as well as more front-line EMS services added. We know that when we make it easier for emergency workers to do their jobs, they make life better for Albertans by improving our health and safety. This government is doing that work, and we will always fight to improve and protect public health services. I'm proud that we're in government and have the ability to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

2:40 Health Minister's Remarks

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today in question period the Deputy Premier referred to the economic downturn as an opportunity to bring in their ideological agenda, the same minister who referred to Albertans as sewer rats. Does she really think that 200,000 Albertans that have lost their jobs under this government's watch are just an economic opportunity?

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you really believe that the tone and substance of your question is going to contribute to better public dialogue in this place?

Mr. Nixon: Absolutely.

The Speaker: You do?

It was such a nice day, too, so quiet in here. Let's all avoid getting it warmed up again, please.

The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When I said "opportunity," what I was referring to is the opportunity to either move with deep ideological cuts or the opportunity to build a better Alberta. When I did say that word, certainly, in the sentence, I can understand why you misconstrued what my intent was. Certainly, fanning the flames isn't my intent. My intent is to build a better Alberta, one that believes in and finds ways to support Alberta families, support public health care, support a good environment, and support good jobs for future generations.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the problem with this government is that they don't want to be accountable for what they say. They want to hide behind it. The minister did call my constituents sewer rats, but further to that, she did say that people who've lost their jobs in this province are an economic opportunity for her ideological agenda to bring in the carbon tax and the ridiculous climate change plan this government has brought forward. Will the minister stand up and apologize to the over 200,000 people who've lost their jobs under this government's watch? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member knows that I intended to do no such thing. I apologized immediately for the wrong choice of words, and rather than continuing to try to create slander and misconstrue my intent, I would ask that he accept that apology. I know he walked out of the House the first time I gave it because he didn't want to hear it, but I genuinely apologize for choosing the wrong words. That wasn't my intent. In no way was I referring to the people of Alberta. This was a long time ago. We are fighting to make sure we have a better Alberta, that we're standing up for the people of this province, that we're getting our pipeline to tidewater, and I'm proud of our record.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we do accept the apology for calling Albertans sewer rats, but what we wanted today was a clear apology for saying that the 200,000-plus people that are out of work in this province under this government's watch are an economic opportunity for this government's ideological agenda. I will accept the minister's backhanded apology there for that, but in the future will this government start taking these issues seriously and start realizing that the things they say have an impact on the people of this province?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are proud to have a strong record of standing up for the people of Alberta. We are proud that in the middle of a downturn, instead of cutting and making things worse by laying off nurses and teachers and lab techs and paramedics, we are building. We're building an Alberta that's protecting one another, that's getting us a pipeline to tidewater, and we will let nothing stop us in our tracks.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've had a request for unanimous consent to introduce a late guest.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of talented Agriculture and Forestry staff that have been working hard these past several months on Bill 7, Supporting Alberta's Local Food Sector Act: Eileen Kotowich, Christine Anderson, Keri Sharpe, Shauna Johnston, Jaclyn Schmidt, and Stuart Elson. I would like to express my gratitude for the time and effort they have put into this bill. I would ask you all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

NDP and Pipeline Development

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard a lot of rhetoric from the opposition bench about the stance of the NDP on pipelines. It's obvious to me that they don't know their history and that they are sensationalizing the subject for political gain. So allow me to share a bit of our party's proud history.

Mr. Speaker, my great-great-uncle, Tom Bentley, was elected as a Saskatchewan CCF MLA in 1949. He worked with Tommy Douglas's government to help make life better for the people of Saskatchewan and Canada by developing social supports like medicare and was a strong proponent of resource development. In fact, it was the NDP that led the charge on resource development in Saskatchewan. The Douglas government was supportive and aided in pipeline and oil field development and protected land rights in the process.

I am proud to follow in the footsteps of my great-great-uncle by supporting important services that people rely on. Like my great-great-uncle and the NDP of the past, I will continue to stand up for Alberta jobs through the development of pipelines, including Trans Mountain, because it's in our party's nature to do so. Our government has done a tremendous amount of work with the industry to support an environment to ensure that when people buy our product, it is the cleanest one possible, by capping methane emissions and investing in renewables with partnership from our industry.

Failing to support projects like these and endorsing radical ideas like the Leap Manifesto could be devastating to our resource sector and could destroy well-paid jobs for Alberta workers. I believe my counterparts in the Saskatchewan NDP recognize that, and to them: thank you for supporting the fight for pipeline development.

And to the members of the B.C. NDP caucus, who I am sure speak the praise of Tommy Douglas regularly, I want you to rethink your position and to ask yourself: what would Tommy do? Mr. Speaker, it is at the heart of the NDP's history and policy to support sustainable and environmentally responsible resource development, and that includes pipelines, period.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Federal Energy Policies

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes you just have to give your head a shake. Recently it came to light that the government of Canada has created an uneven playing field against Alberta and in favour of foreign oil importation. Presently eastern Canada imports around 600,000 barrels a day from foreign nations, primarily the United States and the dictatorship oil. Prime Minister Trudeau vetoed the Northern Gateway and killed the Energy East pipeline by changing the approval process to include upstream and downstream emissions, yet foreign oil is not held to these same standards.

The federal government has created an energy playing field that tilts towards countries like the United States, that sells us their energy products at world price while buying Alberta energy products at the western Canada discount price, roughly half the price. This makes even less sense when you consider that the Canadian Energy Research Institute has calculated that if imported oil was replaced with Alberta oil in the east, there would be a 6.2 per cent reduction in carbon dioxide emissions.

While these stringent pipeline regulations are unfairly placed on Alberta's oil, Quebec is able to open a cement factory that produces 2 million metric tonnes of CO₂ per year, more than most Alberta oil sands projects. Furthermore, the factory was exempt from any environmental review and is without regulation of its carbon emissions. This farcical fiasco of unfairness continues when we realize that Alberta, even though we've gone through a terrible recession, still continues to subsidize Quebec through equalization payments.

And now Kinder Morgan has suspended operations on the Trans Mountain line because of delaying tactics by radicals of the socialist, environmentalist, or liberal denomination determined to trap Alberta's valuable resources in the ground, hurting all Canadians. Like I said, sometimes you just have to give your head a shake.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I'm pleased to table five copies of the committee's report recommending the appointment of Mr. Lorne Gibson as Election Commissioner for a five-year term. Copies of this report are available online through the committees branch.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the appropriate time I intend to move the following motion pursuant to Standing Order 42:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately take steps to repeal the carbon tax and withdraw its support for the pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change given the failure of the government of Alberta and the federal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's leadership to ensure the construction of the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline expansion.

I have the appropriate number of copies for the page, Mr. Speaker.

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of an article called Bubble-Zone Freedom from *Liberty Magazine*, September 2000 edition. It quotes the member of the Official Opposition: "Despite Jason Kenney's attempts to shine a spotlight on what he calls 'the most gross systematic violation of any group's freedom of speech in Canada,'" where he is referring to bubble zones.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a piece called 'We're in Crisis Mode Now': Energy Sector Fears Investor Exodus as Trans Mountain Pipeline Stalls, which I referenced yesterday during the emergency debate on Trans Mountain. It speaks of the oil and gas executive praising the Premier's "willingness to directly invest to see the project through, adding there's a business case for Alberta," and they call on Ottawa to take decisive action. I have the appropriate copies.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of letters, that I referred to in my speech yesterday and during the emergency debate, from Paul First Nation and from the Fort McMurray First Nation as well as the government release that included the information from the Métis Nation of Alberta's Audrey Poitras and from Grand Chief Meneen which indicates the support for the pipeline as well as the support for the climate leadership initiative, which inevitably go together.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies here of the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association submission to the Parliamentary Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in regard to Bill C-69. I referred to it in my question today and furnished the minister with a copy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table five copies of a letter from Dale Wells, aged 79, called, My Autumn Lodge Experience. He says:

I moved into Autumn Lodge. I truly enjoyed life there and the area [and] friends that I got to know.

Then the lodge closure situation evolved and the decision to move elsewhere by October 15, 2017, or lose the moving "perks" that . . . [were] offered.

He goes on to say:

I really do miss Berwyn and my friends. I truly do wish that I could move back to Autumn Lodge in Berwyn.

Signed: Mr. Dale Wells.

The Speaker: Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the course of consideration of estimates for the Ministry of Culture and Tourism last night there was some confusion about who is receiving the minimum wage in Alberta. The minister stated that the majority of minimum wage earners are single mothers. I am going to table five copies of information from the Ministry of Labour that shows that, in fact, single parents with children constitute 18,200 of the 292,400 minimum wage earners in the province, or 6.2 per cent.

The Speaker: If the House would just give me a moment here.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, a very brief statement.

Provincial Climate Change Strategy

Mr. Nixon:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately take steps to repeal the carbon tax and withdraw its support for the pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change given the failure of the government of Alberta and the federal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's leadership to ensure the construction of the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline expansion.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion that I am moving I already read for the record when I gave notice of it, so I will not read it again. But to be clear, it has this Assembly calling on the government to remove the carbon tax and to withdraw support for the pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change.

Mr. Speaker, the reason that we move this before this Assembly today is that it's clear, given the developments in the situation with Kinder Morgan, that the promise that the NDP government said in regard to bringing forward the carbon tax and joining that framework has not been completed. It is no way helping towards that end goal of that pipeline, and as such it's time for this government to stop punishing Albertans and to remove this ridiculous carbon tax.

The Speaker: Members of the Legislature, we require, I believe, unanimous consent to proceed with the request by the hon. member.

[Unanimous consent denied]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 5

An Act to Strengthen Financial Security for Persons with Disabilities

[Debate adjourned April 3]

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

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up and speak on Bill 5. You know, I'd like to just take this quick moment to thank the independent members of this House who, during the course of my private member's bill, Bill 211, from our previous session, took the time to take my briefing on that particular bill and this bill here, which, of course, is sort of a direct descendant of that. Without any political hyperbole, I got an e-mail in my office literally every single day or a call or met somebody on the street when that private member's bill, Bill 211, failed last year, and those people were saying: "How can we get this bill done? Allowing Henson trusts is important to me. It's important to my family. We need to be able to get this done."

That is why I am so extremely happy and grateful that our Minister of Community and Social Services decided to take up the cause and introduce Bill 5, which builds on the work of my private member's bill. I would also like to thank the support of my colleagues in the caucus in order to get this bill to the stage where it's at right now. You know, I'm so happy that we have a Minister of Community and Social Services who listens, whether it was when we were dealing with PDD standard 8 – when the community came out and said that this was not the correct way to go, the minister listened – when it comes to the supports intensity scale and the fact that that needs to be eliminated. Again, I'm so proud to be part of a government and a ministry that listens to those concerns.

You know, even last week, Madam Speaker, we all got up and applauded the Paralympians who were in our gallery and put them up there and said: "Look at what you can do. Look at the great work and spirit of competitiveness." Throughout Alberta there are individuals who are persons with disabilities that also say: "Look what we can do. We are like you. We want to be out in the community with you."

That is something that this bill in a small part will help with because, frankly, those who are on AISH have this extra requirement when it comes to inheritances that no other province imposes on persons with disabilities, and that's something, Madam Speaker, that we needed to fix. It was a problem that I saw. It's a problem that members of my caucus saw, and it's a problem that our hon. Minister of Community and Social Services saw, so I was happy to be able to have this bill come forward.

We should talk a bit about the bill. You know, I went out and did consultations, which I've talked about at length before in this House, and from those consultations there were three key things that came out. The first part was to amend schedule 2 by removing section 1(4). What that did is that that allowed a director of AISH to, at his or her discretion, decide whether or not a trust or an inheritance would be or would not be considered part of an AISH recipient's total assets, which creates a massive amount of uncertainty for families, for relatives who would want to leave some money or some assets to a loved one who happens to be on AISH. That, Madam Speaker, is something that I, as somebody who's not on AISH, doesn't have to worry about should, say, for example, my parents pass away. That is fundamentally unfair, and that is something that the community said loud and clear that we needed to fix. This bill, Bill 5, fixes that, and I am extremely happy that that is in the bill.

The second of the three things that came out clearly in the consultation was that in order to have clarity, the amount of money that could potentially be in one of these trusts had no limit. However, when the money came out of that trust, it would be subject to the normal rules of AISH, which allows for flexibility going into the future for perhaps any future changes that may happen. It also allows you, Madam Speaker, to minimize abuses that might possibly happen in the system.

3:00

This was something that was the preferred way of the people we consulted that they would like to see this done. During the course of the consultations we heard from everyone. We heard from self-advocates, AISH recipients themselves as well as their parents, and as well from the accountants and lawyers who specialize in setting up these trusts and working with individuals in the AISH system.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, this is all fine and good if you have, for example, a parent or relative that passes away and that parent or relative has thought through that this money would go into a trust to help an individual on AISH. But, as we know, not everyone who is a recipient of AISH started off on AISH. You know, some people, whatever their disability or affliction may be, sometimes that comes up later in life due to medical issues or sometimes from an accident, which means that sometimes a parent or relative might have not had to think through the ins and outs of the AISH system when planning their estate.

The third part that came out during the consultations was, as they termed it in the consultations, a wills done badly clause. That is perhaps not the correct term we're using in the bill, but that is essentially what it is. What that says is that should an individual on AISH receive an inheritance or similar inheritancelike windfall, they have a full year to decide whether they want to take that asset just as it is and then have whatever adjustments to their AISH that comes with that or, if they so choose, are able to put it in a trust themselves to be able to use it to save for their future and to use it to make their life better. The key part of that is that they have the choice to plan for their financial future as best they can.

You know, I'd like to think thus far in the House that we're slowly moving towards support, at least at this stage of the bill, for Bill 5. As the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills had pointed out previously in debate, I think we have a bit of a common cause in this, Madam Speaker, to make sure that individuals on AISH and persons with disabilities are treated equitably. This part of the AISH legislation in particular perhaps comes from a different period in time, and that is why I'm so glad that, again, we have a minister and I'm part of a government that was willing to take action to correct this.

I'm just going to take a moment. I believe this question came up previously about what happens with these trusts. What happens if a trustee of the particular trust decides to go rogue, for example, Madam Speaker? In fact, that particular concern is well covered in trust law. Families fighting over trusts and inheritance is something that is as old as, you know, the legal profession, so it is a well-worn area of legislation. There are clear guidelines for trustees, whether that's a family member or friend or a trustee law firm that's doing it. There are very clear rules around that in other pieces of legislation. Although asked about it during the consultations, that particular point was not considered to be a concern during the consultation process.

Madam Speaker, I just want to end on a real positive note. This bill, as I mentioned earlier: there is not a day that's gone by where somebody doesn't e-mail my office or talk to me on the street that we need to get this done. This bill, Bill 5, will most definitely make life better for Albertans. It will help ensure that Albertans with disabilities are treated fairly and will support families that are planning for their children's future. I want to thank all of the self-advocates, families, staff that advocated for these important changes both to me during my private member's bill and in the past as well.

I encourage all members of this House to support this important bill at second reading, and I look forward to the continued debate and support of members in the House going forward on this particular bill.

With that, Madam Speaker, thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member who just spoke. I, too, am very proud to be part of a government that is responding to the needs of Albertans. I, too, have had many constituents come to me with questions about when we were going to get to the point that we could protect families and disabled Albertans in this way.

My question to the member relates around some of the consultations that were done, one of which was well attended here in Edmonton in the Federal Building. At that consultation there was actually a lawyer who spoke about the benefits of this, and I wonder if the member could further expand upon what information he has received from the trust specialist lawyers.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, my apologies. I didn't realize you were speaking under 29(2)(a). I thought you were speaking directly to the bill.

Dr. Turner: It is at 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Then go ahead. We'll just back it up to 29(2)(a).

Go ahead.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for your indulgence on 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is correct that we actually had two series of consultations in Edmonton as well as in Calgary, and I also went to smaller rural centres across Alberta, including Lethbridge and Medicine Hat, because I wanted to make sure that Albertans had a chance to bring forward their thoughts on this no matter where they lived.

Speaking to the member's question, what that particular lawyer said – Mr. VanderLeek, who was introduced in the House and was involved in consultations as well – is that because of the schedule 2, section 1(4), that was in the AISH regulation, where a director of AISH could decide or not decide whether a trust was included as an asset, it provided a large amount of uncertainty for him as a lawyer that would have to advise families who are trying to set up their estate to help the individual on AISH so that individual on AISH could either use those funds for when they eventually age out of the AISH system or be able to use those funds for perhaps a better medical appliance to help them, whether it be a power wheelchair or something else, or perhaps a little bit of extra care just to pay for maintenance for, you know, a car or their apartment or place of residence. Madam Speaker, it was so hard for him to do that because he could provide no certainty.

If you're a parent, after being able to have your child, the worst thing that you want to see for your child is that uncertainty. When you pass away, you want to know that they're going to continue to get the care that they need and deserve and will continue to be contributing members of society. As a parent you want to be able to leave behind whatever you can in your estate, no matter how big it is, to make sure that that goes to help your children. That is something, Madam Speaker, that you just couldn't do without these changes, and that was a problem.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was really, really pleased to see that we're debating Bill 5, and I hope to see passage of the

legislation. I did want to know if my colleague from Calgary-Currie contemplates educating members of the Alberta Real Estate Association and the Alberta Mortgage Brokers Association on the fact that, should the bill pass, individuals who are on AISH will be able to therefore actually purchase a property and qualify using funds that come from the trust that was bequeathed to them. I know in my past experience as a real estate agent that I was able, after many, many months of negotiations with the assistance of a caregiver who was knowledgeable with the AISH regulations, to allow an individual client of mine to actually make a purchase while maintaining AISH payments. But it was really difficult, and many lenders were really unaware of the fact that this was a possibility, even though remote at that time.

3:10

With this legislation's anticipated and hopeful passage, I'm hoping that there might be an education piece so that members in the real estate industry, both members of the Alberta Real Estate Association, the realtors, as well as the mortgage lenders from Alberta Mortgage Brokers Association, will be aware of their abilities.

The Deputy Speaker: We're back on the main bill. The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just first want to take an opportunity to thank from the bottom of my heart the Member for Calgary-Currie. I was privileged enough to attend two of the open houses that he had in the consultation, and the member has just displayed excellent vision in terms of his consultation and going forward, and I actually learned a lot.

My youngest has just recently applied for AISH. With the information that the member had brought forward and all of the consultation and everything I learned at those things, I actually went into that meeting quite informed. So I want to thank you so much for that. The timing was ideal. But, also, the member, Madam Speaker, just went into it with such a great deal of passion and thought, very conscientious. There was a lot to learn. It's a very complex and convoluted set of rules and regulations. Again I wanted to commend you for your excellent work, and I'm very glad to see this bill come back again.

One of the things I wanted to also mention. As a parent when you're going through this, one of the things I was also going to mention maybe to the member, Madam Speaker, is that part of this could also be on – I'm not sure within the law where this would fit in – the education of wills in general. I'll talk a little bit more about your wills gone badly piece, which I think is aptly named, personally. I think it speaks to the public. I think it says exactly what happens there.

But when you go forward with a will and when you're doing trusts and all these things, again, it's extremely complex. There are a lot of very talented people that are able to help us through these things, but it's extremely emotional, and you're looking forward to a time when you're not going to be here and when you may not be able to help out. Especially when you have a child that is vulnerable or has a disability of any sort, you want to make sure that that person has the right people looking after them. Sometimes with the nondiscretionary funds or whatever, depending on the decision that you make with those things, the people that you're putting into place are equally as important as the fund itself. Again, I think the member did an excellent job of concluding those things and bringing that information for us, so thank you so much for that.

I just wanted to be clear. There have been a lot of questions, too, about how these trusts work and all of this, especially with regard

to AISH. We have a lot of issues with AISH in that money gets clawed back from AISH recipients for a lot of different things. Again to the member, you did a very good job of making sure that this wasn't going to happen. Sometimes CPP can claw back AISH. There are other things.

We have a person who works for us who is on AISH and then also gets his medication covered. Minimum wage, actually, believe it or not, bumped him up to a point where it actually clawed back either his medication or his AISH. He had to pick. There was no way that we could compensate at the work site for the amount that was being clawed back. Hopefully, those kinds of things are being dealt with. It's one of the consequences of these kinds of things, so I'm very grateful that the member took those kinds of things into consideration with this legislation. It was very thoughtful.

Trusts rarely serve as income, right? They are put there in order to – and like the member had mentioned, there are all sorts of things that happen in life, whether that's the purchase of a house, school. There are a lot of other things that these trusts can be used for in order to enhance the life of a person that is challenged with a disability of any sort. There are a lot of people who don't understand the difference between having that AISH payment and what that trust does, and there are a lot of questions about that. I get at least one or two a month, too, coming through and asking those questions. This legislation very nicely clarifies the difference between those trusts, how they're implemented, and the impact or lack of impact, hopefully, on AISH.

Of course, the member had already mentioned it as well, but I think it's worth saying again that we're one of the very last provinces in Canada to exempt trusts. It's important to understand that having those benefits revoked or clawed back due to inheritance could very much negatively impact the well-being but also the value that a person puts on themselves when they're receiving these funds. It's a part of being able to live independently, and for a lot of these folks that ability to live independently completely alters the way they see the world and see life. So this is really an important piece of that, and it's nice to see that this legislation will catch us up to where we need to be in terms of where we are in the country in financial protection.

Also, if you have two children or three children, the nice thing about this is that that trust fund can be specifically put towards a child with disabilities. So if there are concerns about all sorts of things that can happen when you pass away and dollars are being distributed and all those kinds of things, it's very protected to make sure that the child with disabilities and the child that may not have disabilities can have their dollars going the way that they need to.

Again, for the quality of life for a person that is challenged with disabilities, there is a lot more money. Like the member had mentioned, that could be a motorized wheelchair or that could be that you need ramps put in your home or that you have to live in a bungalow or that you have to have a person living with you for the rest of your life. These are really important things that allow families to be able to put money away to make sure that when we're not here to oversee that, those things are taken care of for our adult children.

I wanted to highlight the importance of the one-year grace period that the legislation put forward. My favourite term: the will was handled badly clause. This is an excellent part of this legislation because life is unpredictable, and this takes that into account. You know, in a perfect world all of us would have time to make sure our wills are intact and that we've done all of these things and can see the future and imagine what's going to happen. In the busy, busy world that we live in, you always think that you have more time and that you're always going to have the ability to do that. As we know, this doesn't always happen; therefore, we end up with situations

where money may not have been taken care of for our disabled family members. It's so important to ensure that for these recipients whose parents haven't had that opportunity or that forethought to plan for what happens after their death, there is time to navigate this complex legal maze and the financial system so that those inherited funds move into that exempt space, into the discretionary and nondiscretionary funds. It's a very thoughtful measure, extremely thoughtful. When you're in grief and you're navigating those waters, it just gives a little bit of time to breathe and figure out how to do this. Thank you so much to the member for doing that and for having the forethought to put that in there.

There's another thing, too, and the member may have mentioned this. There is a difference between discretionary and nondiscretionary, and there are a lot of questions that come up about this. Again, because it is quite convoluted, I think that along with the package of what comes along with this, we want to make sure that our families understand the difference. The Henson trusts, which is where this whole discussion started, are the discretionary trusts. The beneficiaries of discretionary trusts generally don't have any control over their assets or how they're actually distributed. It's a really, really important piece because there are people that may not have the capability of overseeing those trusts, so that appointed trustee is going to be one of the closest people to your heart, one of the most important people in your life as you move forward because that trustee will manage those funds and the assets for the beneficiaries and actually have full decision-making power.

Then for the nondiscretionary funds the trustee doesn't have full authority on how the trust assets are distributed or paid out. So in some cases the beneficiary may have partial control over distribution. Again, it might depend on whether that nondiscretionary fund kicks in when a person is 18 versus 24. I know that in ours we have it sort of progressive, as our adult children get older, based on their ability to see the world and understand finances and all these kind of things, the control over the distribution of those assets that are held in trust. In other cases the trustee is simply required to distribute the assets and income according to some predetermined instructions. Again, it's a very, very thoughtful and profound way to look at how you are putting the future together for your children.

3:20

I think my interpretation of nondiscretionary funds or trusts is correct. We just went through this process ourselves. I want to just make sure. There were one or two things we sort of bumped into going through the process, so I just wanted to bring those up. If a person, a young adult or an adult with cognitive disabilities, is on AISH and let's say that I was to die before I could stipulate the terms of that inheritance that I'm leaving that child or to establish that trust, is there a scenario where my child could be put in a position where they're the ones that are setting up that nondiscretionary fund? This is a question that came up in actual negotiations, so something to think about, I think, in the regulations. I'm not even sure if regulations is the correct place for that, Member, but something to think about. Then appointing the trustee and stipulating the terms for how that money should be spent, something that came up during our consultations, literal consultations because we were actually trying to figure out how it worked.

In the case where a beneficiary is physically disabled but has all of their mental faculties in place, this is very positive because in a lot of those cases those folks are completely as capable as their parents or whoever, when receiving that inheritance, of making financial decisions. But if there is a person that has limited capacity with those kinds of things, we just want to make sure that that individual is not going to be necessarily making the financial

decisions. Of course, this is up to the family in that situation, but it is a spot that I think may require a little bit of tweaking and understanding just because we do not want our family members being taken advantage of, obviously, when we're not here to oversee the situation.

I just want to make sure that there are specific measures put in place to recognize the special scenarios of somebody who may be cognitively disabled, that that is protected and that there is financial counsel in place for them for the future should they not be able to do that. I know that there are public guardians that the office can call on for a review to determine capacity; however, the concern is about the fact that if the individual doesn't have a support network, you know, they could really fall through the cracks here. Something to consider.

When we're talking to friends and family – of course, we have a network of friends and families that are dealing with these things all the time. This is about something that AISH workers could want to catch. We were informed that with AISH caseloads, it is highly unlikely that an AISH worker would have the capacity to intervene in these circumstances. Are we going to rely on kind outsiders to make those decisions? They might have the wherewithal and the knowledge and the assistance of the public guardian's office, but I'm just not sure that we want to leave that to chance.

The other issue that I had again is just a thought here. We were excited to find out about the new disability advocate. Would they be able to track that and intervene? Is that something that the advocate would possibly be able to participate in simply because the advocate would intervene with lawyers and accountants and all that kind of stuff? I'm just asking the question.

Then the other thing that I wanted to ask about is that this legislation of exempting trusts only applies to AISH legislation. We're all aware that AISH is monthly income. It's barely enough to live on, and AISH recipients need to stretch their dollars as a result. Many AISH recipients are also involved with various other social benefit programs – this is what I was talking about before – such as subsidized housing. Has the government considered the implications of limiting exemption trusts for the AISH program alone? If I'm receiving AISH and benefiting from another social benefit program and I receive an inheritance in the form of a trust or transfer and those funds go into that trust, I may keep my AISH thanks to this legislation, but if I'm no longer able to access those additional social benefit programs, I may still be negatively impacted. Just something that I'm wondering about because, again, trust funds aren't usually used to live off of. They're just for special circumstances.

The biggest question I have is about individuals who have already been rejected by the AISH program for receiving a trust in the past. We've had a couple of questions about this in our office, so that's why I'm asking. We know that applying for AISH can be a lengthy process. I mean, it's life altering for some people when they're rejected. What will happen to past applicants of AISH that have been denied access to the AISH program based on inheriting a trust? Will the government be contacting them to reapply? I don't know how that process is going to work. I haven't really been understanding what to say to the folks that have been calling me, so that's why I'm asking.

As I have said, I'm very pleased to support this legislation. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any others wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm quite pleased to make a few comments about Bill 5, An Act to Strengthen Financial Security for Persons with Disabilities. I applaud the Member for Calgary-Currie for his good work in this area. I've been meeting over the years with people like Bruce Uditsky of the disabilities group in Alberta – very passionate and articulate and effective leadership is provided to the disabled community – of course, the parent of a disabled child. He's taught me a lot about what's effective and what's not helpful for many of these folks.

This bill proposes to establish a trust of any value for the family member who's receiving AISH benefits without affecting their AISH eligibility. In practical terms the change means that an inheritance or financial gift placed in a properly prepared absolute discretionary trust is not the asset of the child and will not affect provincial benefits, as I understand it. To be clear, the treatment of trust income, however, is not changing, and this may affect the level of an AISH client's monthly living allowance, as has been discussed. Under the proposed changes disabled Albertans who receive an inheritance or a financial gift will be granted a one-year grace period to invest the money in an exempt asset like a trust fund or a registered disability savings plan.

The AISH program provides a living allowance of about \$1,588 a month, health benefits, and supplementary benefits to eligible adults with a permanent disability. Under current law Albertans with assets totalling more than \$100,000 are not eligible to receive AISH, although there are exemptions for such things as principal residence and a vehicle adapted to the persons with disabilities. AISH benefits end at 65, and that, of course, is the big reason and the need for this as well as the fact that when the parents of a disabled person die and are no longer there to support the individual, there is a clear need that would fall to the public purse if it was not there. There are close to 62,000 Albertans receiving AISH benefits, and the age, residency, and financial and medical situations are considered when determining eligibility.

It's clear to me that this is a step in the right direction and clear to many Albertans who need this help. It's those Albertans that most urgently need the government to also take the next step and index AISH payments. It's been several years now since AISH benefits were increased. The most common concern that I get expressed to me in my constituency when I meet with AISH folks is that this government hasn't at all indexed the AISH payment. That would go a long way to securing their stable livelihoods as well.

This allows us to do something that we haven't done before, and it's going to have a significant impact. I applaud the government for this change. It will not be without cost as more disabled Albertans will now be eligible for AISH benefits. We know that Budget 2018 is increasing the AISH program by \$62 million from the 2017-18 forecast to address expected caseload growth, so one question I had was: how much of that caseload growth is directly attributable to this legislation, and how much reflects population growth? In other words, how many disabled Albertans will this change actually impact? I haven't yet heard that discussed.

With those questions, Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to give my support to this in second reading and look forward to the final discussions and vote.

3:30

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wanted to speak to Bill 5, An Act to Strengthen Financial Security for Persons with

Disabilities, because as I thought about it, I was thinking about the various people with various levels or areas of disability and why a bill like this would be important for them. AISH is a good support for people who are severely disabled, and it makes it possible for many people, people I know, to be able to live independently. But often it's just barely enough, and there's not that kind of financial security that you would often have if you were able to work and save for yourself. This is a way for parents to be able to provide some security, a foundation of knowing that they will have adequate resources to be taken care of as they go through life and after their parents pass on.

I was also thinking about people who become disabled not as children. Even there, having an inheritance, say, from a relative as they're older could really make a huge impact in a positive way in their life but not if it would interfere with them accessing AISH.

AISH is so valuable because it's a program that provides health benefits – dental, optical, prescription drugs – as well as many of the other costs of living. For a number of people I know with mobility issues due to some disability or other, all the mobility aids are vital. A friend of mine has a lift up her six steps, from the sidewalk to the front door, that was broken one time, and she was housebound for several weeks until it got repaired. There was no other option. Things like that can be expensive, and they're absolutely necessary, as are prescription drugs. I know someone with schizophrenia for whom the drugs are absolutely essential, and they're expensive. It's just something that on his own he would be hard pressed, if at all able, to afford. So you get a lot of instances.

Having that is important, but having the extras that are provided or would be made available by having income from a trust makes a huge difference. Again, I'm talking about people just because I know a number of people who are getting AISH support. A gentleman who became disabled in middle age is raising a teenaged child, and AISH is enough to keep them both alive and with a roof over their heads but not much else. So when the child, in grade 10, would like to go on a school trip, it's hard to find the money for that. In order to afford that, it would mean giving up something else which is most likely essential.

I think this is a very good bill. As was mentioned before, we are the last province in Canada, I believe, to have this exemption put into place for people who are living with disabilities. I think it's really important. It's so important for the people that will benefit from it and for the parents who will be able to make provision for their children while they're alive. I know a few people like that, too, and this is just something to really make life easier and less worrisome for them all.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Community and Social Services to close debate.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank all the members that spoke today and shared their thoughts for their support of this legislation. I would also like to thank the cosponsor of this bill, the MLA for Calgary-Currie, for his commitment and work to bring forward these important changes.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Our government believes that Albertans with disabilities should have access to the same opportunities for stability as other Albertans and should be able to plan for their future. Self-advocates, families, and those receiving these benefits have told us that trusts are

important tools that make a positive difference in the quality of life of Albertans with disabilities and that these trusts shouldn't negatively impact an individual's eligibility for AISH. They also said that individuals need time to make financial decisions about an unanticipated inheritance or nonincome sum. We have listened to these voices, and we are taking action.

We want to reverse the wrong that was committed when the trusts were prohibited by the previous government in the 1990s. That is why this act exempts both discretionary and nondiscretionary trusts from the determination of AISH eligibility. It also provides a one-year grace period so that individuals have proper time to think through and make financial decisions that work for them. Through this and other actions we want the community to know that we are dedicated to working with them collaboratively, openly, and positively to make life better for Albertans with disabilities.

I look forward to a further discussion of this act in Committee of the Whole, where there will be a chance to discuss and address the specific issues that were raised by hon. members who spoke today.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

Government Motions

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 April 3: Mr. Westhead]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the motion?

Seeing none, I will now call the question.

Oh, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you for that extra look around the Chamber, especially, Madam Speaker. Fiscal plan and Budget 2018: five words come to mind right away. The first word is "debt," \$55 billion of debt today, headed towards \$96 billion before this Finance minister and this government even consider balancing a budget. That's \$96 billion of debt that our taxpayers have to pay off. Albertans have to accept fewer services and a burden on the next generation. And what a burden it is. It's a burden of \$1.9 billion this year, \$1.9 billion in interest, headed to \$3.7 billion of interest in 2023-2024 before this Finance minister, this government even try to balance a budget, even try to stop kicking the can down the road.

The next word I think of is "inefficiency." In just three short years this Finance minister and this government have increased spending 16 per cent at a time that 175,000 Albertans are unemployed, over 45,000 Albertans have left the workforce permanently. Maybe the stat that is frightening is, as an economist put out last week, that 45 per cent of young men between 15 and 24 years of age cannot find work. So when Albertans, as they always have, become strong again, efficient again, and get back to work, their reward will be paying off \$3.7 billion of interest annually and \$96 billion of debt.

3:40

The ineffectiveness, the next word, of so much of the government's spending: the number of constituents, Albertans, that come to my office and talk about waiting times in our health care, inability to access the government program that they want. When you couple that with the highest per capita government spending next to Newfoundland, it makes one shake their head.

Madam Speaker, what I really worry about, though, is this Finance minister's and this government's permanent disregard for the debt that they are putting on the backs of Albertans, for the debt that they are putting on our economy, and for the interest – the interest – that hard-working Albertans are going to have to pay off permanently, \$1.9 billion this year and \$3.7 billion by 2023. And it surprises me. When I talk to Albertans, Albertans know what interest is. It costs us services. It takes away our tax dollars, so we can spend less on our families and in our communities, and it's a transfer of wealth from everyday, average, hard-working families to rich bondholders, to rich corporations, to rich organizations.

At first it surprised me, coming from the NDP, but then I saw how they structured the carbon tax, and I realized it's no surprise. The past emissions tax had big corporations paying carbon tax or becoming environmentally better or becoming better at reducing their emissions. The big companies were the ones paying the carbon tax. Madam Speaker, now it's every Albertan. Every Albertan. When they pull up to the pumps and see that a litre of regular is \$1.25, they know that it's they who are pulling the burden of this government on their backs.

Madam Speaker, a good financial plan is a road map. It should be a map that shows us exactly the choices that we're making today, how they will affect our future. Well, the hon. Finance minister's road map shows a future of at least \$96 billion in debt, annual interest expenses of \$3.7 billion, a 67 per cent increase in carbon tax, following his ally Justin Trudeau, just to start covering some of the high per capita spending. Part of this budget even is all-in on our resource economy, counting on the Trans Mountain pipeline in later years to help balance the budget, making this government more reliant on nonrenewable resource revenues than in the past.

Madam Speaker, where this government really failed is in being unable to achieve its three highest priorities. It outlined those priorities as protecting public services, returning to balance, and diversifying the economy. Albertans know that the \$1.9 billion in annual interest, \$55 billion in debt just today mean that every single priority that we have for our families, for our communities, for our seniors, for our needs from government is going to be in jeopardy. That's \$1.9 billion. Every single Alberta family is deep in debt for what their government has done, but where this hits home to me is when you realize that \$1.9 billion is greater than something like 19 out of 24 of the government departments.

I get a lot of people in Cypress-Medicine Hat that are concerned about seniors and housing for seniors. When you see that this government is spending \$700 million on Seniors and Housing, approximately a third of what we're paying to bondholders around the world, it makes one fully aware of how interest is going to crowd out all of the other important priorities of Albertans and how this government's lack of ability to control spending, how this government's desire to transfer money from average, hard-working Albertans to rich bondholders is going to have severe consequences.

Madam Speaker, that's not all. I'm just reading today that next time the Bank of Canada meets, most business leaders in Canada are expecting yet another increase in interest rates. I believe that that'll be the third one in the last little while. Not as bad as the six credit downgrades that our Finance minister and the NDP government have had, but can you imagine, for every quarter, half-quarter, half-point or point increase in the interest rate, what this is going to do to the services that we all so much want to provide for Albertans or to that money that needs to be left in Albertans' pockets so we can take our families to movies, we can take our families on vacations, we can help our neighbours, and we can help our communities?

Madam Speaker, this government's addiction to debt and interest is going to crowd out so many of the things that are important to us.

At the same time, we've changed our utility market, where we're already paying over the 6.8-cent guaranteed cap. In the government budget I believe it was \$80 million for having the taxpayer subsidize the ratepayer, and here we are in the first month doing it. We saw the Finance minister come back and ask for an extra \$1.5 billion. His average three years in a row is \$1 billion that he's come back and asked for – he's been that far over budget – a billion dollars that we could leave with families and communities instead.

But can you imagine if the government miscalculated their capacity market and that \$80 million turns into \$300 million or \$1 billion? Madam Speaker, everywhere I go, people in the electricity generation business tell me that they're terrified that this government has exposed us so much to natural gas electricity generation. What if the cost of gas goes to six bucks? Can you imagine? Can you imagine if our Alberta families and communities get hit with that double whammy at the same time as these tax increases, at the same time as these exponentially growing interest and deficits? Albertans are strong, families and communities have been strong for over 100 years here, but this is a time of great concern.

Madam Speaker, we've also seen how this government and its big spending has destroyed investor confidence. Investors know that today's \$55 billion deficit, 2023's \$96 billion deficit is just a future tax on wealth creation, on job creation, and on the good, hard work that these people do and the risks that they take. I've seen numbers from \$30 billion to \$80 billion that this Finance minister and this NDP government have driven out of Alberta. Whatever number it is, that is tens of thousands of jobs, that is thousands of dollars of wealth, and that is thousands of dollars of opportunity for people to earn money to take care of their families and communities.

Madam Speaker, I'll say it again. This government's number one priority of protecting public services: they have been a disastrous failure at it. The interest cost is going to eat into every important priority of all Albertans: \$1.9 billion this year, somewhere around 2 and a half billion dollars next year, somewhere around \$3.7 billion just four years from now. That's before interest rates rise again, and that's before this Finance minister gets his credit downgraded again. This government, this Finance minister have jeopardized every single Alberta family.

3:50

Return to balance was the second top priority. Madam Speaker, we all know that words do not pay debt. What we've seen is a government and a Finance minister in three years add \$42 billion to the debt legacy of Alberta. They took it from \$13 billion to \$55 billion, headed to \$96 billion. If some of his assumptions happen – and we've seen from the past, with his inability to balance a budget, his willingness to go \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion over budget every year, that it will happen again – if this path continues, balance will not be seen. A permanent wall of debt of \$100 billion will forever rob our families and our kids of the services that we desire.

Madam Speaker, I also want to talk about the deficit and how it's presented. A good financial plan is clear. Well, this financial plan is not clear. Yes, this Finance minister and, yes, this government had to borrow \$8.8 billion on their credit card to pay for the groceries, to pay for this year's operating expenses. You have to look in greater detail, but what's in the budget is that they also borrowed \$6.4 billion – \$6.4 billion – for capital spending, a \$15.2 billion shortfall, an incredible number that some wealth creator, some job provider, some hard-working Alberta family has to pay someday.

Here I want to pause. Yes, it's important to get value for money. Yes, it's important to have a priority list so we all know when Albertans are going to get the roads and the infrastructure and the services that we all equally deserve. But the first sign of where

we're headed with interest robbing the priorities of all Albertans is that \$600 million cut to Transportation, \$600 million less. That will start to magnify. We'll start to see that throughout. As I mentioned, not only is interest approximately three times what we're spending on Seniors and Housing, but it's more interest than we're spending on the Justice and Solicitor General department, and, maybe most shamefully, we're paying \$400 million more in interest than we're paying for Children's Services next year.

I look at what this government has done and I look at where we're at today, and I wonder how in the world this government thinks that they're ever going to balance the budget and correct things. We've seen this government raise all tax rates: a 20 per cent corporate tax increase; increasing personal taxes; the carbon tax, the biggest hidden tax grab in Alberta history.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I do appreciate what this member has to say. I have to say that it is distressing to hear that the carbon tax is one of the biggest hidden taxes in Alberta's history. I would wonder if he can continue down that thought line and please explain how it is that this carbon tax is going to affect the average Albertan.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, hon. colleague. I think of my constituency first, my hard-working people that I'm very grateful to represent. Irrigation farmers come to me and say that it's costing them up to \$2,500 a month for their pivots just in carbon tax. It'll mean hiring fewer hired men. It'll mean fewer holidays for them and their family. It'll mean less ability to repair their balance sheets.

I think, you know, that in Medicine Hat we're about 40 miles from the Saskatchewan border. For years and years when my friends or relatives would visit me from Saskatchewan, they'd limp into Medicine Hat with a gas tank right on E, right on fumes because our gas was so much cheaper. They wanted to share in the Alberta advantage. And, hon. colleague, I'm embarrassed to say that now people are filling up in Maple Creek or Swift Current because it's quite a bit cheaper because of not having the carbon tax.

When the NDP government's own expert said that carbon leakage was going to move industries and move jobs to neighbouring jurisdictions that didn't have a carbon tax, he got that exactly right. He got the fact that investment is being scared out of Alberta. Everyday Albertans, working families are seeing first-hand how it is hard to make ends meet, how it is hard to have enough left over to send a child to university, to have a person in sports or dance, and they are doing what they can to make ends meet and keep the Alberta economy stronger.

You know, the other area where this government totally failed was in their third goal, diversifying the economy. The Premier stands up consistently about how they're going to diversify the economy away from nonrenewable resources. Of course, now we have this effort to get the Trans Mountain pipeline. I am certainly cheering as loud as I can, as all Albertans are, for her to be successful in this, but we can't forget that when she was first elected – I call it the apology tour – she ran around Canada, she ran around North America apologizing for the Alberta oil and gas industry, the industry that had provided billions and billions of dollars of wealth . . .

Mr. Cyr: Embarrassing cousins.

Mr. Barnes: Embarrassing cousins.

. . . thousands and tens of thousands of jobs, Madam Speaker, and had been such a great environmental producer in a strong, socially

conscious jurisdiction. We felt the need to apologize for it. Well, I have never apologized for our strong industry. It's amazing the value-added that our men and women in the oil and gas business can do at tremendous risk, tremendous cost, pulling oil or gas out of the ground, and what they can do with it in terms of value-added, all the way to running our cars, our homes, and the industries that it provides.

But let's not forget that now in this budget this government will be 16 per cent more reliant on nonrenewable resource revenue than we were before, another perfect example of how this government has failed. The stated goal was to diversify the economy. They ended up driving billions and billions of dollars of private investment out of Alberta. Investor confidence is at a low. Investor confidence is very, very shaken, driving tens of thousands of jobs out at the same time. As a result, here we are today more reliant as a percentage on nonrenewable resource revenue than we were before. Just another failure of this government.

Hon. colleagues, I'll sum this up. This Finance minister, this government had three stated goals . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Budgets are about choices. They're never a simple exercise, but they tell Albertans what your values are. The values of the Alberta Party are very much in the spirit of not just simply opposing everything the government does reflexively because the government has done it but making sure to hold the government to account, which is an important job of opposition, not simply opposing for the sake of opposition but proposing ideas. That's a core value of the Alberta Party, and I think Albertans very much appreciate that style of politics. I think it's something that's been missing in this province for too long.

While I certainly will offer some critique of this government's budget, the first thing I'm going to do is that I'm going to talk about what the government has done wrong; I'm going to talk about what the Alberta Party would do differently. How would we approach the fiscal challenges facing our province? How would we craft a budget that is going to be optimistic, that's going to speak to the opportunities that exist in our province? Make no mistake; there are tremendous opportunities in this province. Alberta is a remarkable place to live. We have the highest quality of life of almost anywhere in the world. We have some of if not the most innovative, entrepreneurial, caring, remarkable people anywhere in the world.

4:00

A lot of that strength comes from the diversity of this province, and that is something that we believe must be leveraged and tapped into, appreciated and celebrated, diversity of all kinds. We need to find pathways for indigenous people to participate much more fully in society and community, to address some of the terrible inequities that have happened through time, to realize the opportunity that comes from unlocking that talent that exists within indigenous communities, that exists within communities of new Canadians, that exists within communities of people who have been here for a long time. There are opportunities in this province that are not, unfortunately, being fully realized.

One of the first things the Alberta Party would do to recognize and realize those opportunities is that we would invest more in K to 12 education than this government's budget proposes to. That is a value that we hold dear, that we are going to educate a capable,

diverse workforce that is not only prepared for the 21st century but is going to create the 21st century, that is going to create the jobs of the future right here in Alberta.

The other thing the Alberta Party believes in is the power of "and." While we believe we can create the next economy right here in Alberta, we also believe that we can and should have a strong oil and gas sector in this province. Although the world is changing around us, we absolutely must get our products to tidewater. We absolutely must find a reasonable regulatory structure that ensures that Alberta develops our oil and gas properties, our oil and gas assets, responsibly, which we have always done in this province, but we do so in a way that has a minimum of red tape, that attracts investment back to Alberta, that does not see the capital fleeing to the United States and other jurisdictions as it has, that we create an attractive investment climate in this province, that we ensure that the people will be investing in Alberta, creating those jobs in Alberta, like we've done in this province for so long so successfully.

Other choices we need to make: the Alberta Party would find ways of ensuring our health care system is far more efficient and effective than it is. Our Health budget takes up nearly 50 per cent. Health spending in this province takes up nearly 50 per cent of every dollar spent in this province. That is far too high, and those costs continue to increase. We would find efficiencies within the public health care system by ensuring, first and foremost, that front-line personnel feel that they have a stake in making the system better. For too long it's been a top-down, closed culture that does not welcome innovation. One of the most important things we can do is reform AHS culture to make AHS more receptive to innovation in service delivery.

The Alberta Party believes too many patients are being treated in acute-care facilities when they would be far more comfortable in communities in more appropriate settings, and they would have better health outcomes. They would be closer to home, closer to their families, and it would save us money. That must be an imperative. There's far too much duplication and overlap between AHS and Alberta Health. That not only costs money to simply physically run, but it slows down the pace of change, the pace of innovation. It slows down adaptiveness and responsiveness, and the people that I talk with in the system are profoundly, incredibly frustrated. They have gone into health care because of the emphasis on that second word, "care." It's a caring profession. They want to make the system work. They have a stake in making the system work, but far too often they feel beaten down. They feel dismissed. They feel that they can't have the impact that they want, they can't bring the changes that they want because the system just simply holds them back. The duplication and overlap between AHS and Alberta Health has a big impact on that.

We would reform EMS dispatch to ensure that paramedics are not stuck in emerg waiting with a patient and that those paramedics are instead on the roads where we need them, providing the services that Albertans rely on, those remarkable people who are looking out for us in our most desperate times. They're not stuck in emerg, but they're out on the road doing the work that we need them to do.

The Alberta Party would review unfilled positions within AHS management structure and make sure that money is not being spent simply holding a position. We'd focus on wellness, on mental health, on long-term care, on chronic conditions like dementia. We would bring in a proper dementia strategy, not just some headlines and some rehashed announcements and reannouncements. We would genuinely and truly listen to people in communities, those with dementia, their loved ones and caregivers to make sure that we get it right on these important, important areas.

Speaking of another important area, AISH and PDD. The Alberta Party would not only index AISH payments to the cost of living;

we would make a one-time catch-up payment. AISH has not been increased in this province since 2012, and that is probably one of the most surprising and profoundly disappointing aspects of not just this budget but of all three previous budgets this NDP government. This government, that is supposedly there for the less fortunate, for the people who in our community we need to ensure that we are looking out for, they have let those people down. The most tangible example of that is the fact that AISH funding has not yet been increased, and I'm afraid that as we head into an election year, this is the kind of thing that we can expect to be made as part of an election platform.

I was always taught to do the right thing because it's the right thing to do. Increasing funding for AISH is the right thing to do. It was the right thing to do in 2015 and '16 and '17 and '18, and just because none of those years had an election in them, it didn't mean that you shouldn't have done that. That's one thing that the Alberta Party would do, catch up AISH funding and index it going forward.

We would focus on social innovation. We would partner with the not-for-profit sector and ensure that they are partners with the government in innovative and cost-effective service delivery. This is an area where we have a strong sense of volunteerism, we have a remarkably robust not-for-profit sector, and we have opportunities to innovate in how we make those services more efficient. The government should be using its role as funder to compel some efficiency within that system, within that structure.

There are multiple disconnected government agencies. Not-for-profits I talk with are profoundly frustrated at the stovepipes that happen. They work to specific granting envelopes, and even if those don't make a lot of sense, they do what they need to do to keep the lights on. We need a more flexible, more innovative funding model to ensure that not-for-profits can deliver the services that Albertans deserve.

Seniors' housing. You know, one of the most remarkable things I learned in the estimates process with Seniors and Housing was that the vaunted \$1.2 billion, five-year investment in affordable housing in Alberta has just kind of quietly become a seven-year investment. That's 40 per cent longer. How many Albertans will not be housed in affordable housing because this government has dragged its feet in rolling out what should be a compelling project? My guess is that they've done that because they want to take a government-first model and not work with not-for-profits, not work with private delivery agencies. There's no good reason to do that beyond pure ideology and a world view that says that you think that's a good idea. Well, it isn't. We had a model in this province that has worked incredibly well for a very long time, and this government has arbitrarily gone away from it, which has caused people to not be housed in affordable housing who badly, badly need that housing. Seniors' housing is another area where we have that similar problem.

We've talked about indigenous peoples. Through our work with the child intervention panel I know that there is some work going on there. There has been some increased funding and we very much applaud that, but we want to make sure that we are clear here in the Alberta Party that we absolutely support Jordan's principle. It should be the role of the provincial government to ensure that services are provided to children, services are provided to people who need those services when and where they need those services, and if there's a jurisdictional fight to be had, it is our job as the government to manage that on their behalf. Our job is to manage the complexity. If we need to go fight with Ottawa for funding, we fight with Ottawa for funding. We don't put that on the people of Alberta.

On the climate change file, making climate leadership work for Albertans is very important for the Alberta Party. We have been very clear that we believe in a properly executed carbon tax. We

think that can work. The Alberta Party believes that climate change is real. We believe it is human caused. We believe it is a problem that needs addressing. But we also see the opportunity in addressing climate change in this province. It is not simply a matter of having a few headlines, of creating a carbon tax, and then looking to our west and saying: "We have a carbon tax. May we please have a pipeline?" Clearly, that hasn't worked.

4:10

The purpose of having a carbon tax is to ensure that we have the resources we need to innovate. The purpose of that is to shift behaviour and ensure that we have created a framework where innovation can happen here in Alberta, and I firmly believe it will be Alberta companies and Alberta technologies that we will sell to the rest of the world. Here in Alberta we can solve the problems that our world has as it relates to climate change, and that creates market opportunity. Unfortunately, we have a government that's looked at it as a simple cash cow, as a source of revenue, and they've unfortunately, I think, really soured Albertans on what can and should be a very potent policy tool. We saw a group of economists just recently talk about how a well-structured carbon tax can work. We need to move it to revenue neutrality, not as a cash cow. These are the opportunities that exist on the climate change file, but unfortunately this government has let us down.

Now, I'm going to spend the last couple of minutes here that I have not just talking about what we would do differently. One of the great concerns I have with this particular budget the government has brought forward is that so much of the so-called path – and I don't know if *Hansard* will be able to capture my air quotes when I say "path to balance." My grave concern is that so much of that path to balance is based on ifs: if we get a Kinder Morgan pipeline built, if that pipeline is built on time; if we get Enbridge line 3, if that pipeline is built on time; if corporate income tax increases; if personal income tax increases by 40 per cent; if oil prices go to \$75; if we turn 3 and a half billion dollars of nonrenewable resource revenue into 10 and a half billion dollars of resource revenue; if this government actually sticks to their very own budget that they put out, which, by the way, you haven't to date at any time. That's an awful lot of ifs. I think I'm running out of fingers on two hands to count up the number of ifs. There's too much risk. Even if you actually achieve all of those things, we still find ourselves with \$96 billion in debt at the end of the day.

In the last minute I just want to read some questions, and perhaps I'll have an opportunity under 29(2)(a) to talk about some of what I heard at a budget town hall that I held in Calgary-Elbow here on the weekend. Just while we're talking about some of the challenges with the carbon tax, one of my constituents asked me to ask the government on her behalf – and I will do this now – how the carbon tax is allowed to be a tax on a tax, how it is that we're allowed to have GST charged on top of the carbon tax. This is a source of great frustration. This is someone who tells me that she doesn't mind action on climate change but had grave concerns about the way this particular government has rolled out the carbon tax. So on her behalf I ask that question to the government.

My concerns are that even if this government actually achieves all the things it says that it's going to do – and while I'm cheering for all those things to happen, I really have my doubts that they actually will – we'll still have \$96 billion in debt. Even if only one of those things goes wrong – and, by the way, as we've obviously seen here recently with Kinder Morgan, we already know that one of those risks has been realized – then we're looking at well in excess of a hundred billion dollars in debt. That is something we and our children are going to have to pay back. That leads to upwards of \$4 billion a year.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to acknowledge the Member for Calgary-Elbow for coming up with a shadow budget for four budgets in a row. He's done a remarkable amount of work, and it shows he knows this topic really well. I'm wondering if the member has any sense of what the impact of the shadow budget would be on future generations in contrast to the current budget as it's proposed.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I really appreciate that. You know, one of the things our shadow budget would do is that we would spend more money on capital investment than this government would propose to spend. When we have an infrastructure deficit in this province like we do, there are badly, badly needed schools, not just new schools but refurbishing existing schools; health care facilities, and not just large-scale hospitals although, of course, that's a huge part of it; seniors' facilities of all different levels to ensure that we can move people out of hospitals so they're in communities closer to home and in accommodation that's more appropriate for them and that we're saving the money that we need; that we're investing in affordable housing; that we're investing in transportation and infrastructure; that we're investing in transit; that we're investing in flood mitigation. These are things that matter very much to the people of Alberta. The way you do that, Madam Speaker, is you set your priorities, and you ensure that the operational side of spending doesn't get out of control, unfortunately, like this government has.

I will take this opportunity to ask some questions and just share some of the dozen or so comments that I asked my constituents to write down when we held a town hall in Calgary-Elbow this past Saturday. We had about 20 or so intrepid souls come out in the snow and sleet to talk about the budget. What struck me was the interest that that group of constituents had in ensuring sustained, high-quality, efficient, and effective public services. That was the message I heard loud and clear. Equally, they understood that to do that, we need to be able to pay the bills. They were willing to make sure that as long as the services that were provided were high quality and efficient and effective, they're willing to pay fair value for that.

Some of the questions. This, I think, ties to the shadow budget that we have brought in and to the question the member asked. Point 1 is to ensure a civil and respectful dialogue and climate in government. Well, that isn't always possible in this place, Madam Speaker. Politics has been known to break out in this place. But I do hope that a core value of the Alberta Party that we demonstrate is raising the level of debate, not just opposing for the sake of opposition but proposing ideas.

There was a desire for sustainable funding for schools and that we ensure that we maintain reasonable class sizes while addressing the increasing complexities of our student population with a specific focus on mental health. That's something we believe very much in. It's a very, very important area of emphasis for us.

A constituent felt it was very odd to have a carbon tax on schools, giving a school board a budget and then taking a portion of it back for a carbon tax, money that really should have gone to students. Should that not be exempt? Yes, in my opinion, it should be exempt, and it's an oversight and a shortcoming of the way this government has rolled out the carbon tax.

How can we speed up strengthening indigenous peoples so we're not continuing to waste the tremendous human potential in

indigenous communities? Again, a very, very thoughtful comment and something that I referenced earlier.

How do we not just provide health care services, but how do we catch up on wait times and address the health system backlog for better outcomes and long-term cost savings to the system? Invest now to catch up on that backlog. Make sure that those wait times are cut down.

How do we better educate industry about public and regulatory expectations so investors know what they're facing in a predictable way? Make sure that we reduce red tape and have clarity within the regulatory process of all kinds as a part of the grand bargain to make sure that we attract investors.

How are we reducing administration in health, education, and other areas to spend more money on the front lines? An absolutely essential question, especially in health care.

Someone asked about climate change. The question that was asked by my constituent: what percentage of climate change is due to anthropogenic activity? Of that, how much is discretionary?

Someone asked whether we would consider a PST. That was a question that was asked. The comment was that they were willing to pay fair value for high-quality public service.

How are we preparing young men for adulthood? How do we make sure that . . . [Mr. Clark's speaking time expired]

I ran out of time.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise, and I would like to propose that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:20

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 7

Supporting Alberta's Local Food Sector Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, forestry and agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Either/or, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much. It is my pleasure today to move second reading of Bill 7, Supporting Alberta's Local Food Sector Act.

I'm seeking the Assembly's support for a plan to help strengthen Alberta's local food industry. This legislation is an opportunity for our government to help the local food sector realize its full potential through a more focused and deliberate approach. Supporting sustainable growth in the local food sector includes leveraging existing programs to address barriers and strengthen the ability of local producers and processors to succeed, introducing legislation to raise the profile of the local food industry and strengthen consumer confidence, and exploring additional opportunities to address challenges. Alberta and Saskatchewan are currently the only provinces that have not implemented a local food strategy.

There are several key points in this legislation which directly reflect feedback we received from local food stakeholders through our engagement processes, including how local food should be defined, setting standards for organic food, designating a local food week, and creating a local food council.

Setting standards for organic local food means that we intend to adopt the Canadian organic standards. Organic producers who are

exporting internationally or even across provincial boundaries already have to comply with these standards to market organic food, so we are just levelling the playing field for all producers. Essentially, we are saying that in order to use the word “organic” to market your products, you have to have organic certification. Simple as that. This brings local producers in line with existing federal standards, so we are closing a regulatory gap and giving consumers consistent assurance of the expected standards the producer is meeting when consumers are purchasing any organic food products in Alberta.

The next initiative in this legislation, designating the third week of August as Alberta local food week, gives us an opportunity to celebrate and promote local food in our province. Local food week is a great fit with the established Open Farm Days initiative to really help build awareness and draw more attention to local food. Open Farm Days is an annual cross-ministry and industry partnership that celebrates local producers and gives Albertans a taste of where their food comes from and how it is produced. Farmers and ranchers invite their urban and rural neighbours to stop in for a visit to share stories, see demonstrations, and learn more about the farmers who grow their food. Some of Alberta’s most talented chefs in rural communities also host a memorable series of farm-to-table culinary events around the province using Alberta farm-fresh products. Open Farm Days is in its fifth year and has grown each year, reaching over 100 host farms with a total of 20,000 visitors last year. This summer we hope to celebrate Alberta’s inaugural local food week, and, of course, everyone is encouraged to join Alberta’s farmers and ranchers and chefs as producers open their gates on August 19 and 20 for this year’s Open Farm Days.

This act also establishes a local food council. This council will be representative of Alberta’s local food sector, including large, medium, and small producers and processors. They will provide advice and report on provincial policies, programs, pilot projects, or initiatives to support the continued growth and sustainability of Alberta’s local food sector, including potential barriers and challenges for local food producers and local food processors, specific challenges faced by small producers and processors, local food aggregation and distribution, how to increase consumer awareness and access to local food. This advisory board will provide fulsome guidance and a thorough report on the current state of local foods in Alberta as well as its challenges and the many opportunities in this sector.

Continuing to support the growth of this industry is an important step in achieving our government’s economic diversification and job creation goals. This legislation will help create opportunities to promote the local food industry, enhance consumer awareness and education, and reinforce consumer confidence. Food and beverage processing is one of the largest employers in our province’s manufacturing sector, with record sales of \$14.6 billion in 2016.

Consumer interest in and demand for local food continues to grow, making this an important market opportunity for rural sustainability and for Alberta producers and processors. In Alberta local food sales and direct-to-consumer channels such as farmers’ markets and farm retail have more than doubled since 2008 and exceeded \$1 billion last year. Alberta has a vibrant farmers’ market industry, with both public markets and more than 130 Alberta-approved farmers’ markets contributing more than \$850 million in 2017 to the growth and diversity of our provincial economy.

A great deal of innovation in food is coming from start-ups who are capitalizing on shifting consumer preferences. Our government already supports these efforts through policies, programs, grant funding, risk management programs, and research. For example, my ministry’s Leduc Food Processing Development Centre provides business incubation support as well as scientific support for recipe refinement and scale-up.

Initiatives such as the successful Alberta small brewers development program have also helped local craft breweries expand their businesses and invest in new product development. Agriculture and Forestry’s Explore Local program supports Alberta’s direct-to-consumer food producers and processors by delivering events, research, resource development, education, coaching, mentoring, and advocacy.

Alberta is the only province in Canada with a government-led approved farmers’ market program that serves as a valuable business incubator to provide business growth opportunities for community-based businesses to make, bake, or grow the products they sell. One of my favourite stories that has been a real success in Alberta is the Little Potato Company, those little bags of potatoes you can get at Safeway or Superstore. They were a farmer and daughter operation out of the back of a truck at a farmers’ market right here in Edmonton. They now employ more than a hundred people in the city of Edmonton and have expanded to the state of Idaho and the province of PEI as well.

Small and medium-sized businesses throughout the program can also access programs like the community and regional economic support, CARES, program, which can provide training for businesses entering the organic growing sector, improve agrifood processing capacity development, establish mentorship programs, encourage local spending and opportunities for value-added processing and manufacturing in Alberta.

In developing this draft legislation, we engaged with several other ministries and numerous external stakeholders to get feedback in the early stages of developing our proposal. I’m also thankful to the MLA for Strathcona-Sherwood Park for her hard work and input on this important initiative. We heard from people representing a broad cross-section of producers, processors, industry groups, indigenous peoples, and municipalities. All the feedback we have received to date was taken into consideration during the development of the proposed Supporting Alberta’s Local Food Sector Act. There are nearly limitless opportunities to build on this legislative platform and continue to celebrate and raise awareness of local foods in Alberta.

I look forward to our debate of this bill in the Legislature, and I anticipate it will spark some important and exciting conversation about local food amongst my colleagues here. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I’d like to move to adjourn debate on Bill 7.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members that would like to speak? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks, Madam Speaker. It’s an interesting day in the Chamber today. Thanks for the opportunity to speak to agriculture, one of my most favourite things, and also to speak to Bill 7 and expound on some of my thoughts. It’s very interesting. We’re talking about Supporting Alberta’s Local Food Sector Act. This bill has the primary focus to standardize the use of organic labelling and certification. This will ensure that any food products grown and produced here in Alberta will comply with current CFIA standards in labelling and certification. Currently there is no one threshold for products produced locally for sale within Alberta. This would strive to make a uniform minimum standard within Canada. Outside of Canada, in the U.S. they have a completely different standard than this, so that’s somewhat problematic.

4:30

I understand that the overall purpose of this act will be to encourage the development and success of the local food sector throughout the province and to regulate agriculture products that

are produced or processed in the province and marketed and sold as organic products, again, within Alberta. It is intended that this would be achieved primarily through three parts of this act, starting with establishing local organic standards, the creation of a local food week to coincide with Open Farm Days in August, and, finally, this act proposes to establish a local food council.

I will start off with the first part, establishing local organic standards. This, I guess, closes a loophole or a shortfall in existing legislation. As I understand, previous to this products sold within Alberta had no established common criteria for organic labelling or standards. However, if you exported these same products outside of Alberta, you had to comply with CFIA standards for labelling and certification. Going forward, the CFIA standards will have to be met within Alberta in order to use the term “certified organic” on these products. This puts us into the same standard as other jurisdictions. The hon. minister has talked about Saskatchewan, but I also believe that Quebec may have a weakness there. Now, that’s not necessarily a bad thing, to have a minimum standard. But let’s face it. If I was building bicycles in my garage, they would have to meet certain safety standards set out by the Canada Safety Council, and this appears to be much the same idea.

Now, all of this doesn’t mean that I may not have some concerns, though, and I hope that through debate and through questioning those can be alleviated. I have reached out to several producer groups about this issue, and I continue to wait for feedback. Concerns that have been raised to me are: is this in any way taxpayer funded? By that, I mean that if a local producer wants to get certified and is willing to comply with the process, will the cost be simply part of their business model and covered by said producer in its entirety, or is it entirely covered by the government? Do we know for sure how much this certification costs, and is there a fee continuing on after being certified and approved or associated with a certified organic label? Madam Speaker, the question also begs: how long does this process take, and is there an overbearing bureaucratic process involved?

I understand the heartfelt intent of this legislation, and we’ve dealt with this and discussed this in the Chamber before. These are important questions that some folks want answers to, and that’s part of this parliamentary process. Madam Speaker, as you well know, sometimes the devil is in the details, and wordage going forward is absolutely critical and important.

Speaking of these details, another small issue came up in the brief time we’ve had to consult about this bill with some stakeholders. It’s been brought to my attention that in the act, especially on page 4, under application, 3(a), it seems to have consequences, possibly unintended consequences, that far outreach what the bill is purported to be. This section talks about, in my interpretation, Madam Speaker, all agricultural products, and I would quote from the bill.

- 3 This Act applies to
 (a) agricultural products produced or processed in the Province.

Now, that’s a wide-ranging commentary because we also have commercial production within the province. It does specifically talk about organic products produced or processed in the province. So, Madam Speaker, that’s somewhat a bone of contention. Given the mistakes that the government has made in the past on rural issues, I believe that it’s fair. I’m witnessing the minister making notes in that regard, and I think that’s fair. Whether we have a legitimate complaint or not, I think it’s our role, our duty, our responsibility to Albertans to get clarity on this.

Madam Speaker, why does an act that purports to be primarily about organic labelling and certification include subsections (a) and (b) which separate organic products and all others? Why would the distinction be needed? If it’s a needed distinction, I’d argue that

subsection (a) may not provide an accurate distinction. On our farm we grow and distribute products that go to commercial food use; i.e., a maltster. Now, those are commercial food products. Would we still, with that interpretation, need to be certified, need to be qualified to do this?

As a Conservative I always tend to focus on things like red tape, bureaucracy, and extra costs. This bill is no different. I can’t help but wonder why the need for the formation of a local food council to provide a report no later than 12 months after the establishment of said council “containing advice and recommendations regarding provincial policies, programs, pilot projects or initiatives to support the continued growth and sustainability of Alberta’s local food sector.” Madam Speaker, the market does that.

Now, on the upside, I find it refreshing that there is a drop-dead date to this council, and for that the minister is to be commended.

This government made it a priority to review ABCs in Alberta and find efficiencies, and again I commend the minister and the government for that. I have to ask: why couldn’t an existing group be tasked with this project? Why not use the Alberta Food Processors Association, for example? They handle commercial and organics. Why the need to create something else from scratch? Wouldn’t there be a more efficient and effective way of doing things? But, then, government funding seems to be unending. Wouldn’t it save the need for ministerial appointments? Was that explored or rejected? We have no understanding of whether it was or wasn’t. Why didn’t the minister commission a white paper? In previous governments the minister would go out and voluntarily seek public opinion to create a white paper of opinion from voluntary participants going forward. These are all legitimate questions that need to be answered, Madam Speaker.

As I mentioned earlier, the devil is in the details, and there are some details that are a bit troubling in their vagueness. Now, I already talked about section 3(a), and I need to point out an issue that arose from discussions amongst members about section 6(a), the certification program. This clause gives the minister extraordinary powers to establish “a certification program for agricultural products other than those certified as organic.” Madam Speaker, I just gave the example of our farm, where we deliver products to a human food-use facility. Could it be interpreted that we, too, would have to have a certification program because it’s going to a food-use facility? It’s not specifically defined in the terminology in the legislation presented to us. This is worrying.

For what reason does the minister need this power or the unelected regulator enforcers? Why are we discussing certification of nonorganic products in this bill purported to be about standardizing the Alberta regulations to coincide with federal CFIA ones? CFIA, Madam Speaker, is a high standard. I’ve been to facilities where people gather eggs in the small community of Nobleford, in southern Alberta. They voluntarily inspect the food that they receive and sell it as CFIA-qualified inspected.

Madam Speaker, I’m afraid that this is going to cause some issues with farmers. As a group this government hasn’t exactly endeared themselves to rural folk over their time in power, and I don’t think this clause will help that opinion. I stood in the Chamber during the debates over Bill 6, and I fully hold witness to that.

4:40

Will the minister be asking us to just trust that this clause won’t be used to bring in other standards on all agricultural products? That could be raised. Again, the devil is in the details. Are we going to be required to certify all the grain we grow? It’s not specifically written. I know some members have joked across the bow about the precursor to the Alberta Wheat Board. I know I would perceive that to be completely hilarious, but the wording doesn’t preclude that.

Does the certification include how many cattle or hogs are raised, or is this simply a clause used to enhance a standard marketing ploy, perhaps a made-in-Alberta standard? That is to be expounded upon.

Whatever the purpose, the vague way it's presented, the very obtuse language, makes us wonder what the end game is here. The wording is ambiguous, Madam Speaker. I understand that consultation takes time. I can't help but wonder. I would like to see a list of the groups that have been consulted. We've reached out to our own groups, including the beekeepers association of Alberta. I mean, we've got this bill, and the way this bill reads now makes me take a pause and really consider what the unintended consequences may be.

Madam Speaker, I look forward, with great respect, to learning the answers to my questions and those that are brought up by my colleagues because I see the minister studiously taking notes in regard to my questions. With that, I would close my comments for now, and we'll move forward as we go forward in further debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today on Bill 7. As the minister said and as members of this House know, the local food system in Alberta is extremely important to a lot of consumers, and it is also an important part of our economy. I think that's why we're here today to have this conversation. In a lot of ways it's a unique day to have a conversation about a regulation that is actually asked for by farmers. You know, it's not often that that happens.

I can definitely table these tomorrow, but I know I have letters here from Alberta milk producers that describe the gap as a regulatory gap. One of the impacts that they told me about and that you hear about is that you go through all of the certification of becoming organic, but then what happens is that you can't export the product because you have no certification that says it is that. It's because when that regulation went through on a federal level, it wasn't implemented in Alberta. So since 2009, Madam Speaker, they've been asking for us to bring in the ability for them to say: listen, if I do the work to have an organic farm, I want to be able to demonstrate that and I want it to be able to mean something when I export my products. I think that's what we're able to capture.

You know, I have letters that I'm happy to table as we go forward this week, Madam Speaker, from Alberta milk producers, the Egg Farmers of Alberta, Homegrown Foods, Highwood Crossing, the Organic Box. I think it's because they see the importance of reducing barriers in the capacity to export the amazing products that are being delivered in Alberta. That's one aspect of this bill, and I think that it shouldn't be confused with a different section of it.

This bill isn't solely about organics. It's talking about how to support the local food system in Alberta. The local food system in Alberta isn't solely comprised of the organic section. We all know that, so it shouldn't be confused as such. That's why the section noted by the previous speaker, who asked why it encompasses other folks outside of the organics, is because one section talks about how we can support local producers, processors, and farmers in connecting with consumers and how we can connect them with the ability to build a stronger local food system.

They just look at those issues, and they look at it over a reasonable timeline, which is a year, Madam Speaker. Not only that, it also describes the ability to have a council that has a broad spectrum of opinions from large, medium, and small producers. I think that there's an absolute value in that because it is hard to understand how to support the large spectrum.

I think that there is something even more so that becomes important – and I've had this conversation with many producers and supply management when they visit the Legislature, Madam Speaker – the ability and the importance of talking to consumers. I think that something we'll see growing over time is the interest that modern consumers have in where their food comes from.

One of the fears that I have is that people will make all of the decisions as to what food they will choose to eat and why because of some documentary on Netflix. A lot of the young generation that are informing themselves about local food and where your food is coming from are looking for that information, and they're maybe not finding it in the same place that we would have before. They go to the media streams and the information sites that they go to now, and a lot of those don't encompass what the Alberta food system is. I think that we miss out on something when we don't know the information applicable to the area that we are purchasing from.

I think that there is a great value, and I think that that's where the common cause is in this. Whether you're a small, medium, or large producer, your ability to create a connection and build consumer confidence is extremely beneficial. The government does have an ability to look at what the barriers are in being able to do that, to be aware, to be able to know what your competitive margins are.

I think that when we talk about that, that's why it's important to look at one section of it, meeting that regulatory gap, which is the fact that the organic certification wasn't happening in Alberta. Anyone could use the word "organic," and it basically can be used. There are a lot of examples within farmers' markets where people actually just started trying to verify it themselves and in a very informal sense started acting as their own regulators so that people coming to visit that farmers' market could verify that it was organic. That's not necessarily what you want to do. That doesn't build consumer confidence. Knowing that the word that is being used is expressing a very specific thing that consumers know is helpful.

Then the second section talks about how we can strengthen our Alberta food system. That's where it's broad, and it's meant to be broad because our food system is broad. We have small, medium, and large. It doesn't need to be focused on just one area in order for it to be effective. In fact, you don't want it to do that. I think that's where sometimes we go into conspiracy theories as to what that could possibly mean. But I think that when you look at the intention of what we're trying to achieve here, which is to look at the ways that we can build consumer confidence, support our networks, identify barriers, if it's for small producers, there might be different barriers than for the large ones. If we can identify those and leverage strengths within our community to help support them, that's something that can happen.

I think that an integral part of the role that government can play in strengthening one's economy is looking at that information, taking that all in, and moving that forward. I think that there is an important role that government has to play in allowing for a space to have further conversations. That's why I don't think that this conversation ends here. When we look forward, in fact, if the Legislature decides to pass this bill, Madam Speaker, you have 12 months to get feedback from a whole bunch of different groups, to have those conversations, and to be able to give a back and forth as to what is the best way that we can support our food system in Alberta. I think it's a conversation that transcends urban and rural, and I think it's an area of commonality that is extremely important because I have yet to meet families that don't think about the kinds of food that they eat.

4:50

I think that's something that Albertans are proud of. Albertans are very proud of the beef that we have here, of the best steaks that we have in Alberta. We need to continue to be proud of the various

things that we produce and to be able to connect Alberta Open Farm Days, the concept that has already been there, with the idea of how we can support and engage people on a local food system. It's kind of a natural merger of where we need to progress to. Why do we want these people coming together, and what are the strengths of local food? It's the relationship that people have with their farmers. That's what research will tell you over and over again. The strength in local food is that relationship with the farmer, that relationship to understand where your food is coming from.

As we move into a more urban environment, we also see the impacts of what the distance has on children. Kids in urban centres that haven't seen, you know, where their food comes from make those comments that are kind of funny but are really a sad statement of how disconnected we can get, like when they say, "Where does a carrot come from?" and then say: the grocery store. Right? We need to make sure that we're developing mechanisms to connect urban and rural.

One of the natural things that has always and for all of history joined us together is food. I think there's a very little group of people that would argue that food hasn't always been a way that we have come together. When we talk about farm days and when we talk about, "Let's expand that and make a way of looking at how we can bring together a local food week," that is a place of strength for this government but also for the community and also for the economy. It brings the capacity to have conversations that are not as easily related in reports.

I know I read a lot of information from the milk producers or the beef producers. There is a lot of really great information. A lot of times it happens in infographics. You know, I have access to it because I'm an MLA, because I talk to these folks, and because I have these conversations. But I know my friends that are interested in that information, that maybe are in university or working, when they start looking this information up, they don't know where to go. So I think that if we find places to bridge those connections, we really provide an avenue for Albertans to come together whether you're from an urban area or a rural area. I think that there are so many places we can benefit from.

I really believe that one of the best things that could have happened was a few years ago, when I stood up in this House and I talked to the Alberta Local Food Act, which was a different bill. I think it's very important to distinguish it as a different bill because it is. One of the major things that I had hoped to accomplish then was to have a conversation about local food, to have a conversation about how to move that forward. I think that since then – and I think that's why it's important to distinguish that this is a different bill than what that was – you have those conversations.

We're able to go out and talk to people about what can support small and medium and large producers, what can support the consumer that's interested in these things, what can support farmers' markets, what can support, you know, the supermarkets that are having an organic section, what can be put in place, and also talk about what is achievable within the fact that we're in fiscal restraint and that we can't just be able to put money in supporting all of these different programs. I think that this is where leveraging things that are already in place, broadening it, is something that is extremely important. I'm proud to know that the minister of agriculture took that on and had those conversations. It really means a lot to me, but I know that it means a lot to a lot of different people.

From the very start when this all started, I knew that local food is a conversation that's not going away. It's a conversation that will inevitably be part of our culture, and I think that's partly to do with the fact that we've never had so much information at our fingertips than we do now. Why would that be different when it comes to the food that we eat every day? Why would the consumer that gets to

review absolutely every product that you buy not want that kind of information about the food that they're bringing to their tables, to their kids? They provide so much effort on so many levels to make sure that they're going to the best schools. You're able to have an avenue to have these conversations about how we can support a changing generation in being interested and being interested in a productive way.

I think that's the distinguishing feature of when we get solely educated based on documentaries on Netflix about what the food system is versus actually getting together and talking to a farmer, visiting a farm, and seeing where that food comes from. It gives you a completely different experience. I think that's one goal that Albertans would be in line with of really having for their kids, having for their families, but also having for the food that they bring to the table. I think that's where we're going to have to continue having this conversation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I know that there's been a lot of work at the different levels of making sure that there are programs about what it's like to deliver the food to that table. There's a different experience based on whether you're a small producer, medium producer, or large producer, right? When you have the capacity to be a large producer, you also have the capacity to have a large market that you depend on in order to make sure that your farm is sustainable. The same isn't true for smaller ones. Whether one is the best or not, it's important to make sure that we're actively thinking about what the impacts are. I think that the minister of agriculture has taken leadership on being engaged on those issues, and I applaud him for his efforts in doing so. I think that it's something that we need to continue doing.

There are lots of volunteer groups, agricultural societies that incorporate into their sustainable programming things like being able to make sausages, you know, and people bring their products there. They have a commercial kitchen that they're able to rent out, and that's part of the thing that makes their agricultural society sustainable. When we talk about that, that is integrated into our food system. We should know what those impacts are. We should know what we can do to leverage those kinds of tools to not just support the producers but support local volunteer organizations, that are incredibly powerful, impacting our economy and our communities.

Madam Speaker, this is something that I think we can get a lot of similarities on.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Go ahead, Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes. I enjoyed the comments by the minister immensely – no; the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park. [interjection] Well, soon maybe, or maybe not.

But the question to the member, you know, is about the literal interpretations of the legislation that we have in front of us. It says in here:

- (a) "agricultural product" means
 - (i) an animal, a plant or an animal and plant product,
 - (ii) a product, including any food or drink, wholly or partly derived from an animal or a plant.

Madam Speaker, it doesn't include a valuable sector, an organic food known as honey, because bees are not a plant or an animal.

Part of what my comment is, Madam Speaker, is that I'm able to sell my product directly to a maltster because of a freedom that was achieved in 2012 from legislation that was created in 1943. Part of the reason that we're able to have the freedom that we have now in

this country to have craft beers and microbreweries, north of 70 microbreweries in Alberta to my understanding, is because of the freedom that was created in 2012 from legislation that was created in 1943, federal legislation. That is why I may sound somewhat significant or distinct or trying to be as concise and as accurate as I can in the definition.

To the member opposite: could you explain to me how this legislation would relate to people who produce honey?

The Deputy Speaker: Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think that one of the interesting parts of any kind of local food discussion is the definition, and it is the part where absolutely every single local food discussion starts. It sometimes cannot even go anywhere else because people can't decide: well, you know, I produce it here, but maybe part of it goes to B.C. It's one of the reasons that it had to be brought. I think that there is definitely an intent here to make sure that we are looking at how we can support the food system, and we know that there are always limitations in the definitions of local food. That's always the case because in some instances you can define it as having to be produced, processed, and completely made in Alberta, but then you lose a big sector of the organization. Definitely, I know that it's been a discussion. I don't have the answer for the member as to specifically how it impacts honey.

5:00

What I do know is that our government is really committed to making sure that we are listening to those of you that are wanting to strengthen our local food system. That's why we're creating a council, to have to these discussions. It's not just a partisan conversation but an ability to have the discussions on an overall level. There are very few ways that you can try to bring in a definition that isn't at some point going to take someone out. I think that's part of the fact that you are trying to talk about your local food system, but you're also talking about the processors, you're also talking about the transportation routes, and you're also talking about the fact that they travel. You know, that's why I call it a system more than just the sector, because it's one that has to be worked on together.

One of the difficulties when it comes to researching the smaller ones is that you can't actually publish a lot of information about the smaller ones because it's too identifiable to know which farm you're talking about because there are probably only a few of them. It becomes harder to generalize that information and to make it into policy to support them. I think that's where we come into a strength of talking about the issue as a whole, to build a comprehensive kind of full-spectrum support of how we can step forward in this discussion.

One of the recommendations that I'm sure the council can explore is: do we need to encompass these different areas? I can actually clear that up. Part of the bill actually brings in a local food council, and that council is made up of folks from small, medium, and large producers. It's also processors. It's also the folks that run farmers' markets. It's a large spectrum of people, and I think they have the discussion as to how we can support these groups of people. I think that's where we talk about why the legislation talks to their mandate.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 7? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege today to stand and speak to second reading of Bill 7, Supporting Alberta's

Local Food Sector Act. At first blush a lot of folks maybe were thinking that this would be a rehash of Bill 202, that we had seen before, just under a similar name and similar title, but I am glad to see that it is not. But I do have some questions and I do have some concerns on how we proceed forward.

The Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park just alluded to the intent of the bill, to serve good, but we also have to recognize that there are risks in everything that we put forward, and interpretation can lead to different results from the intent. We try and produce legislation here that is as all-encompassing as possible and to take into consideration all possible results before we approve legislation and move forward with legislation.

You know, the bill is titled Supporting Alberta's Local Food Sector Act, and I guess the one thing I would ask, then, is: what is the government's role in that? We have to ensure that government is doing what is necessary to serve their citizens in a way that does not interfere with the ability of the citizens, the industry, and others to continue to reap the rewards of their opportunity and continue to produce and process agricultural products meant for consumption in a way where they're able to produce it and process it in their specific manner, that would be able to be marketed to others.

You know, we look at Bill 7, and it's divided up into three main parts. The first part, part 1, is regarding local food. With that part, it's a recognition of Alberta local food week. I think that's good. That can't hurt. It's identifying the importance of local food and brings awareness to industry and producers and processors and retailers that are involved in local food, the food that we are able to consume as Albertans. So I don't see where that can potentially cause any unforeseen circumstances.

Then we move to the local food council, and when we start to move to the local food council, there's a need to get a full understanding of the intent of the council. It may be good, but we have to allow ourselves to recognize that there's potential for results that are unforeseen, that could create difficulty in our marketplace and could create difficulty for individuals to have opportunity and to be able to search out their opportunity.

I look under Local Food Council, that part of it. The council is to provide a report containing advice and recommendations regarding provincial policies, programs, pilot projects or initiatives to support the continued growth and sustainability of Alberta's local food sector, including the following matters:

- (a) potential barriers and challenges for local food producers . . .
- (b) local food aggregation and distribution;
- (c) risk management tools.

These are all good.

This is essentially where the minister is looking for a report, but then, at the end of the day, the report is left in the hands of the minister, for the minister to make regulations, and that's where it becomes concerning that the minister is then in ownership of the report. Are we sure that we're getting the outcomes from the report that are going to ensure that the government is involved in the role that the government is meant to be involved in, which is, in my opinion, to ensure that we have food product and agricultural product for consumption, to ensure that that's a safe product for consumption by Albertans?

One thing: 5(f) is "certification opportunities for local food producers and local food processors." I would have a little bit of difficulty with going along with the open-endedness of that. I'm trying to understand why they feel that those opportunities are possibly not there at this time.

The second part of the bill, organic agricultural products. The Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park mentioned that the dairy group was lobbying towards recognition of organic standards

within Alberta so that they can export their product. Well, the dairy industry cannot export their product regardless of the recognition of organic. The dairy industry is a supply-managed industry, so there is no opportunity for them to be able to export their product.

This type of certification that's being looked at here appears, to me, to run in line with CFIA certification. We have to ask ourselves: what is the industry, whether it's dairy or any other organic production, expecting government to actually take a position on here? Are they expecting government to be there to enforce the regulations that are put forward? When we take a look at organic foods compared to nonorganic foods, is it the government's role to decide whether one is safe and one is not safe? Yes, but if the government decides that they're both safe, then we look at the fact that we are able to allow production of those products without having to spend taxpayers' money to protect the brand of one product versus the brand of the other products.

5:10

We also have to be very careful. You know, we have it separated into two parts in this bill, local food and organic agricultural products. I believe the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park was also on a couple of occasions not necessarily stumbling but mixing the two together as if they're one in the same. That would not be accurate, so I think we need to recognize that that is a risk also, where it's looked at as if this is a bill on local food, but it's definitely a bill on local food and the organic brand part of the food sector in Alberta.

You know, full disclosure here, Madam Speaker. I am a grain producer. I have in the past also been a beef and pork producer. I've been involved in agriculture all my life. I am glad to see a bill like this come forward and a recognition of the importance of agriculture within the province of Alberta and what it provides for the province of Alberta.

We are very fortunate, and it's described in the beginning of the bill here, in the preamble. The preamble recognizes that "a thriving local food sector continues to build on the strengths of the Province's agriculture and food industry, which includes a highly productive land base." We in Alberta and throughout Canada need to recognize the blessing that that is for not only us but for others throughout the world. That productive land base allows us to provide a diversity of crops, livestock, and other agricultural products. That land base is producing products that are far beyond the ability of Albertans to actually consume. Some of that product will be consumed here; some of the product will need to be exported.

You know, a lot of product that we currently consume as Albertans that's purchased at the local supermarket is locally produced. Is there a necessity to promote that? Possibly, but I think we also have to recognize that there's a critical point in time where there are supermarkets and individuals working together at this current time that are retailing local food through their systems and that have developed good relationships and have spent the time to do that. We want to ensure that we don't get in the way of them being able to do that.

As with many things in government, we have to recognize that we don't want to interfere with what's already a good thing. People have invested time and energy and dollars to develop the ability to market their product as a local product.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 19(1)(c) we must move to the next order of business.

Hon. members, yesterday the vote pursuant to Standing Order 19(1)(c) was postponed due to the emergency debate. Therefore,

this afternoon I must put the question on the following motion for consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech.

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.

[Motion carried]

Government Motions

(continued)

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

15. Ms Larivee moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

The Deputy Speaker: This motion is debatable. Are there any members who wish to speak to this?

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to close debate?

Ms Larivee: Yes.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, prior to moving to the next order of business, I've had a request for unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

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

Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you my sister and my niece Gwen. My sister is a devoted New Democrat and a fierce feminist, and she's also here to watch the debate on Bill 9. My niece Gwen is also a devoted New Democrat and is a Premier in training. I'd like to ask the members to give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 9

Protecting Choice for Women Accessing Health Care Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise to move second reading of Bill 9, Protecting Choice for Women Accessing Health Care Act.

This legislation will help women in Alberta access abortion services without fear of interference, harassment, threats, or intimidation. It will also protect doctors and other service providers. Our goal is to stand with Alberta women to ensure that they feel safe when making health care choices. Madam Speaker, abortion has been legal in Canada since 1969 – that's nearly 50 years – and it's been nearly three decades since the Morgentaler decision was rendered by the Supreme Court of Canada. Generations of women have legally been allowed to access abortion procedures without restriction, but in Alberta the reality is that women who want to exercise their health care choice still face safety and privacy concerns. Let's be clear. This is not about freedom of speech. It's about ensuring that Albertans can access health services without being bullied.

The Kensington clinic, in Calgary, and the Woman's Health Options clinic, in Edmonton, have reported an increase in protestor activity. At Kensington they've reported a doubling of protestors just in this last year. The 40-day campaigns were organized to target women and staff each spring and fall. Last week I met with staff from both clinics. They talked about patients being physically blocked as they tried to enter the clinic. They talked about yelling so loud that it could be heard throughout the concrete building. They talked about protestors banging on car windows or blocking their doors so that patients couldn't exit their vehicles. They talked about patients so agitated that staff had to calm them down when they entered the building. They talked about patients who do not show up because they're too scared for their safety. It makes a difficult day even more difficult, one of the doctors told me.

One of the ironies here is that some of these women desperately want to be pregnant. For reasons beyond their control they haven't been able to carry healthy pregnancies to term. It adds insult to injury for these women to have to listen to strangers shouting at them.

The same doctor talked about her own unease outside her workplace. Every day she rushes to get in her vehicle and away. If she stays in the parking lot, she risks being watched, photographed, approached by a stranger hoping to intimidate her. Photography has become a new favourite bullying tactic in recent months. Staff tell me this. "Bullying" is the key word here because a bully preys on the fear of the unknown.

Madam Speaker, these clinics currently rely on court injunctions to keep protestors at bay. These injunctions were put in place years ago and have had to be repeatedly amended at the expense and time of these clinics. It's costly to go to court, and these injunctions have proven to be a very limiting tool. Even with injunctions, protestor activity is on the rise. Today's protestors know that consequences don't exist. Police simply ask them to leave. They may. They regularly come back the next day. Or they can leave before the police even arrive. Stronger measures are needed.

5:20

Bill 9 names this for what it is, a public health and safety issue. It demonstrates the government of Alberta's commitment to safe and timely health care and to removing barriers for vulnerable women. This legislation would be enforceable across Alberta. It would also be flexible. It could be used to protect pharmacies or the homes or offices of doctors or other service providers.

My cosponsor will talk you through more of the details, but I'll give you a basic overview of this bill. Access zones would be established around the Kensington clinic and Woman's Health Options. Inside these zones patients and staff would be free from

interference and harassment. They would be protected from being blocked, coerced, or threatened. Family and friends accompanying their loved ones would also be protected. Just imagine that someone you know makes this choice. You want to be there for them. You have to watch your daughter, your sister, your friend be called a murderer by a complete stranger.

The bill protects women and staff from unsolicited photos, videos, or other recordings inside the access zone and protects them from third parties distributing or using these photos or recordings. It protects doctors and service providers from worrying about whether protestors will target their neighbours and friends to try to bully them into not providing abortions.

This legislation includes fines and potential jail time. The need for real consequences is something we've heard repeatedly from these women. The penalties are meant as a significant deterrent, and it's my hope, Madam Speaker, that police never have to use these as a tool of enforcement.

I am proud to introduce this bill today because I believe that Alberta women should feel safe when making choices about their health care. We heard yesterday that the Leader of the Opposition does not agree. He does not believe the women who say that this is a problem. He doesn't believe those women. He does not believe that they are subjected to bullying and that the current injunctions that are in place are ineffective. He has clearly not been listening, Madam Speaker, not listening to the women who've publicly said that this is going to make a real difference in their lives, not listening to the other provinces, like Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, which took similar steps in recent months, not listening to British Columbia, who had to act on this almost two decades ago. I am disappointed but not surprised given the opposition leader's track record on women's choice.

But let's be clear. By failing to say yes, he is saying no, saying no to these women who are asking for some dignity, some respect, and some space to access their doctors' offices. By failing to say yes, he's turning a deaf ear to shouts of harassment and to bullying. By failing to say yes, members of the opposition can't simply change the channel. You can't opt out of this problem. It's not too late to consider a simple question before you here today. Are you going to stand up for women? Or another question: as a member of this Legislature, are you going to protect vulnerable people? This is about freedom from intimidation tactics that rely on shame and stigma as well as fear.

On this side of the House we're committed to standing up for Albertans, we're committed to saying no to bullies, and we are committed to helping Alberta women make their own choices about their own health care.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today on behalf of my colleagues and Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition to speak to Bill 9. I must admit that I'm rather saddened to be standing here today debating this piece of legislation. I'm disappointed to see my hon. colleagues on the government side of this House play such an obviously cynical political game with such a sensitive issue. I am disappointed to see this NDP government politicize and reignite a deeply divisive debate. As the *Edmonton Journal's* Paula Simons recently said during her podcast: it pains me to think we are going to make this into a political football. While this bill does not officially seek to reopen the abortion debate, it appears that the NDP is trying to do just that. Ironically, the NDP is trying to do exactly what they frequently accuse their opponents of.

Why have they done this, Madam Speaker? A desperate, floundering government in the final years of its mandate is trying to score a few cheap political points by painting the opposition and its supporters as fundamentally incompatible with women and women's rights. They have deliberately created a situation where personal views on deeply personal issues are publicly adjudicated, and those who fall on one side of the line are shamed by their own government. We have seen this time and time again from the NDP. You don't agree with the carbon tax or the climate leadership plan? Well, you must be a climate denier. You think the government should be doing more to control costs? You must want to blow up hospitals and fire all the teachers. You want to protect school choice and parental rights in education? Well, you must not care about vulnerable kids.

We recently saw the government's allies the Trudeau Liberals play a similarly cynical game with the summer jobs program, for which the federal government was rightly called out.

Now, if you don't agree with what many see as an attempt to curtail Albertans' right to free speech and peaceful assembly, the NDP say that you must condone the harassment and intimidation of vulnerable women. Madam Speaker, that's a ridiculous notion. Alberta is a diverse place, including diversity of opinion, and that's a really good thing. It is high time that this government dispensed with the false choices and straw-man arguments and started defending its policy decisions on their merits. Instead, we see the NDP working overtime to instill fear in Albertans because it knows that its failed economic agenda is deeply unpopular with voters. Shame on them. It's a desperate move by a desperate government. In fairness, though, I understand why the NDP doesn't want to discuss their \$97 billion debt or their failing energy strategy. I understand why the NDP is trying to distract Albertans from the current headlines.

Madam Speaker:

Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:

- (a) freedom of conscience and religion;
- (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression . . .
- (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and
- (d) freedom of association.

Now, that's not my opinion. That's directly from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, for those opposite who might not be aware.

However, we do not have the right to harass and intimidate others as we exercise those rights. We agree a hundred per cent with the Minister of Health when she says that the harassment and intimidation of vulnerable women are completely unacceptable. Harassment is already part of the Criminal Code of Canada. There are other parts of the world where this is more of a common phenomenon, which isn't to say that it hasn't happened at all in Alberta. Again from Paula Simons: I remember when there used to be really nasty protests outside of clinics; that hasn't happened in a very, very long time.

We've heard troubling anecdotes from staff at each of Alberta's two main clinics, and we agree that this behaviour is wrong and it should not be tolerated. That's why there are long-standing court injunctions in place to keep protestors at a distance. We expect the police to properly enforce the law. These court orders, combined with existing laws that prohibit harassment, have worked to keep this behaviour to a minimum for almost two decades.

Madam Speaker, any law that we pass in this Legislature must balance the objective that it is trying to achieve with the protection of our Charter rights and freedoms. We all have a responsibility as MLAs to defend the Charter rights of all Albertans, even those we disagree with. As a party rich with history of protest I truly hope that the government has considered these implications, but many have expressed concerns that the government has not. Yes, women

entering and exiting abortion clinics absolutely have a right to do so free of intimidation and harassment, but citizens also have a right to express peacefully their opinion as it relates to abortion, even if some don't want to hear it. Bill 9 impacts one's ability to do so. What's more, it offers no more protection than the existing court injunctions do today.

5:30

But like I said earlier, Madam Speaker, that wasn't really the intent of this bill. The intent all along has been to draw this side of the House into a debate on an incredibly contentious social issue and claim any opposition to their flawed legislation as sinister. The NDP is trying to pit Albertans against Albertans. Well, I will not take this bait. I will be abstaining from voting on Bill 9. I know that the reasons for being on one side of this issue or the other are complex and deeply personal, and it's not up to any of us to judge Albertans for their personal beliefs, especially if those beliefs are expressed peacefully and in accordance with the law.

In closing, Madam Speaker, let me leave you with this quote from Evelyn Beatrice Hall, who famously wrote: I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.

Thank you.

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

Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. That was really hard to hear on my end. I am offended by these comments. I'm offended as a woman. Not only are these comments hurtful to me; they are hurtful to all women in this province. I believe that the Member for Airdrie should apologize to all women.

Madam Speaker, I'm here to talk about Bill 9, and I'm here to talk about why it is needed, why it is long overdue, and why our government is finally acting on this. This is a piece of legislation that has been ignored for the past 44 years. In fact, I actually arranged a tour of Kensington clinic in Calgary with government members here, and they said to me that staff were saying that we were the first government to ever step foot into that building, to even look and see what they do. You know, I was happy to go, and I found it really informative and educational. We had a really good discussion about what's needed and what our government can do to help. This was one of the things that they said: we need to expand the bubble zones so that women don't feel intimidated when they're accessing their legal right. It's not fair to these women, who are in a tough situation. No one wants to get an abortion, but sometimes it's needed, and it's not anyone else's business but their own.

You know, I am proud that our government went to that clinic and actually educated ourselves and did something. Now we are actually putting in change; we're doing something about it. That's why I'm so proud to be part of this government. Because we listen to Albertans. We don't make excuses like the Official Opposition, using freedom of speech to get out of it. I'm offended by that, Madam Speaker, and I wanted to get that on record.

I'm going to get to the bill now. I rise to speak to Bill 9, the Protecting Choice for Women Accessing Health Care Act. This is an incredibly important piece of legislation. Doctors, staff, patients, families, and friends of people accessing abortion services have been speaking out about the harassment they face. As the Minister of Health has outlined, these concerns deserve a response, and I am proud to see this legislation, which enacts the most stringent consequences for those seeking to interfere with women's rights to access health care services.

Bill 9 establishes a 50-metre access zone around Kensington clinic in Calgary and Woman's Health Options in Edmonton. These access zones protect women and their families as well as staff,

doctors, and service providers from intimidation, interference, and harassment. No one can try to deter a patient from accessing abortion services or demand that a physician or service provider not provide or facilitate abortion services. The bill bans unsolicited photos, videos, or other recordings of patients, physicians, or service providers both inside and outside an access zone. To protect patients and staff, it would be illegal to use these kinds of photos or recordings to prevent someone from accessing or providing abortion services.

This legislation also protects patients and doctors outside of access zones in Calgary and Edmonton. Doctors and providers would be protected from being repeatedly approached, accompanied, or followed with the intent of convincing them not to provide abortions. That includes medical professionals already providing abortion services or those who may do so in the future. Threatening conduct against doctors and staff is out. It would also be illegal to harass a doctor's neighbour, friend, or family member to try to influence their willingness to provide abortion services. It would be illegal to repeatedly send unwanted communications via phone, mail, fax, or electronic means.

Finally, the legislation also includes potential protection for homes of doctors and service providers as well as offices or pharmacies. As pharmacists now can dispense Mifegymiso – sorry if I'm pronouncing that wrong – a drug used to perform medical abortions, we want to ensure that the legislation allows for future protections if they are needed. Through regulation, on a needed basis, a doctor's home could be protected by a 160-metre access zone. An office could be protected by a 20-metre access zone.

This bill also includes provisions dealing with injunctions, actions for damages, arrests, and the use of survey documents as evidence in court.

As the Minister of Health pointed out, these penalties are meant as a deterrent. For the first offence an individual could be fined up to \$5,000 or sentenced up to six months in jail or receive both a fine and jail time. Other offences: those fines increase up to \$10,000, one year in jail, or both a fine and imprisonment. Separate penalties for corporations are included because the distribution of images or recordings taken in the access zone might be carried out by a corporation. A corporation could be fined a maximum of \$25,000 for a first offence, which would increase up to \$100,000 for other offences. It is also possible to be prosecuted as an individual while acting for a corporation.

These are real consequences, with teeth, but they are equally balanced by the consideration for the Charter-protected rights to free speech that every Canadian has. We care about these very important rights, Madam Speaker, but they must be held in balance with each person's right to access health care without restriction or interference. I believe this legislation strikes that balance, and I urge all members of this Assembly to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? My apologies. I was looking on the wrong side. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

5:40

Ms McPherson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I understand that it would be difficult to see me on this side of the House right now.

I'm really proud to be able to stand and provide an opposition perspective on this particular bill. I think Bill 9 is an important bill,

I think Bill 9 is a necessary bill, and, if anything, I would urge the government to go even further with this bill.

This bill establishes a bubble zone, a safety zone of 50 metres, around the establishments that do provide abortion clinics and other reproductive health services to women. There are two right now in Alberta. We have one in Edmonton, Woman's Health Options, and we also have the Kensington clinic in Calgary. As the Member for Calgary-Bow was talking about, I also participated in the tour of that clinic. It was very concerning to me that people think that it's okay to try and prevent women from accessing legal health care. I can't imagine any other circumstance where people would think it was okay to protest somebody seeking health care. If I was going to go for a bypass, if anyone was going for a bypass, I don't think anyone would think it was okay to have protestors outside of the hospital saying: "No. I'm sorry. You can't have a bypass today. Think about what you're doing."

The bill also has provisions in it that prevent, essentially, institutionalized protests against abortion, which I think is really important. This goes further than other bills, and I think that that's a really smart move on the part of the government.

Things that I would like to see enhanced. I know it's not directly in this bill, but not all women in Alberta have equal access to reproductive health care, and not all women in Alberta have equal access to abortion services. I know that some of that has been improved with the introduction of the very difficult to pronounce medications that do help with this procedure. But it is, honestly, my sincere hope that at some time in the future every woman in Alberta who requires an abortion has the unfettered, unbullied, unintimidated access to be able to seek an abortion.

I also want to talk very briefly about the medical professionals who provide these services to women. These are people who are dedicated and incredibly caring. They care about women's health, they care about women's well-being, and they have respect for women. That's why they provide the services that they do. I know there are jobs that some people do, like firefighters or paramedics, where they understand that there are inherent risks to their lives in providing those services to our communities, but I don't think that doctors and nurses and other health care professionals who are providing health care, legal health care, to women should be afraid to go to work. They shouldn't be intimidated. They shouldn't be discouraged from providing legal health care to women.

Somebody earlier had talked about having deeply held personal beliefs that prevent them from taking certain actions. While I have a great deal of respect for people's deeply held beliefs, nobody has ever been compelled to have an abortion, to my knowledge, in Alberta. There may be some cases outside of the auspices of this particular legislation, but this is a health care procedure that women seek because for whatever reason they find it necessary. I had an abortion when I was a younger person. What I did was that I went and I talked to my doctor. Those are the only two people that should be involved in this conversation regardless of what anyone else's beliefs are.

I think that at the root of the protest against women seeking abortion services is a mistrust of women. I think that people don't believe that women are smart enough or empowered enough or deserving of being able to make decisions about their health care by themselves with their doctor. It's no one else's business. For these reasons, I am very happy to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the member for her comments. There were a few things that were said

by a previous speaker that I want to set the record straight on and take this opportunity. Feel free to elaborate, hon. member, in the time remaining.

Number one, this is not the same as the current injunctions that are in place. It's not the same for a few reasons. The current injunctions don't apply to public property like streets. They don't apply to the roads. They don't apply to the sidewalks. I've had women tell me that somebody will stand on the sidewalk, because the injunction doesn't apply to the sidewalk, right up against their car door, so they can't open their car door. Or they stand on the sidewalk, blocking the access so that women going to their doctors' appointments feel that they have to go through the mud puddle and the grass to get to their doctors' appointments.

These are the kinds of changes that this legislation will make to the physical space. It'll also be 50 metres, which is a greater space of protection than the injunctions. But the main thing that they said is that an injunction without any enforcement mechanism, without any teeth isn't worth the paper it's written on. So by actually giving some tools to law enforcement to actually be able to enforce the rules that are in place, rather than going and saying, "Please move on" – somebody may or may not move on, but there's nothing to compel them to respect that direction from the officer on future days.

I do want to say to the previous speaker that what was said doesn't reflect reality. I also certainly welcome the hon. member to respond to that.

One other thing I wanted to mention is that aggression is something that was mentioned by the women who've approached me, saying that they'll be with their spouse, going to get this procedure done. Their spouse feels really awful for them and is there to support them, and then they are called a murderer or a killer or, you know: it's not too late to change your mind. It actually creates greater aggression between the spouse, who's there to support their loved one, and the people who are on the streets yelling these things.

Your remarks with regard to both those factors would be appreciated. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Injunctions, I agree, aren't effective. They aren't doing the job. We've seen protestors escalate their behaviour. They are finding the boundaries of the injunction, and they're taking advantage of that. It is incumbent on a government to protect everybody. People who disagree with abortion procedures are certainly welcome to make their voice known in other ways, but to interfere with somebody who is seeking a legal health care procedure or advice even is unconscionable. For those reasons, that's why injunctions aren't enough.

I think aggression towards women, regardless of how that's expressed, during protesting against women who are seeking abortions is at the root of why people go out. It is a disdain for women, it is a disrespect for women that seems to motivate these kinds of actions. I can totally understand somebody not agreeing personally with seeking an abortion. I would say: please, don't ever seek an abortion; don't do that. I don't think anybody would ever compel them to.

Our country has decided that this is a legal procedure and that women are able to make these decisions on their own, of their own accord, and for these reasons, yeah, aggression should not play into them seeking that kind of a procedure.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for this opportunity to speak on this important legislation. Often this place gets called an echo chamber. I can't imagine why.

The member from the Official Opposition continued to ask us: "Why now? Why would you do this now? Why would you bring forward this legislation to protect women trying to get reproductive health care?" Well, why now? Because it wasn't done in the '70s or the '80s or the '90s or in 2000 or 2015. So it's time. It's overdue. It is long past due.

You know, it's kind of interesting to hear the new world view from across the way. If the view doesn't have the name Justin Trudeau or job-killing something, it just doesn't seem to fit.

5:50

But I'll tell you why I think this is so important. Just last summer – and I'd sort of forgotten that this was a problem because driving by a clinic or a place where women can obtain these services isn't on my normal route anymore. I drove by and actually saw a person being really loud and moving a sign around. I saw him going after a woman pushing a stroller. So I stopped, and it just clicked: oh, my gosh; this is where the clinic is. I pulled over and took a photograph of this. It was horrible. This woman was clearly trying to make her way into this clinic or to see a doctor or a provider. This person was holding this gross sign right in her face, and there was a baby in the stroller. Of course, people were driving by and watching this. I thought: this is so ridiculous. This is so ridiculous. Not to mention that people have died from the violence by the people who just don't agree with a woman's right, a woman's human right. They have killed physicians that do this procedure. They have vandalized and torched clinics that offer this procedure to women or support women in this way, and it just continues.

All we're trying to do here today is to say that it is not okay to harass and intimidate women as they exercise their absolute right to obtain health care. And what do we get accused of? We get accused of playing politics. That's baloney. That's absolute baloney. This is about: finally, we're getting to it. Finally. Just like so many other pieces of legislation, it's about: finally, we are getting to a place where we're having this conversation. It's not about what you believe or your religion. It is about protecting a woman's right to choose her health care and to get safe health care without abuse and intimidation, and it is not up to the provider of the clinic to pay the money, to spend the time to get an injunction. That's ridiculous.

A couple of years ago I had a little taste of what it was like to be the target of somebody's belief, thoughts about abortion, about women's reproductive rights. Maybe it was because I was on vacation and really relaxed and not following the whole Alberta Legislature Twitter feed. You know, it was right around the time the leader was running or had made his intentions clear to run, and one of my concerns following federal politics here in Alberta has been just the positions of different federal politicians around women's issues. That's something that has always been important to me.

So I asked a question about what his stance was and then proceeded to offer some personal information. If I could roll back time, I don't know that I would do that because the hate and the abuse and the threats and the most disgusting, vile things that came my way were just mind-boggling. Those were anonymous people that were safe behind a computer screen firing this disgustingness at me, and it just made me think about what that was like for that woman with the baby in a stroller, just pushing it to a clinic just trying to get some health care and that this man was able and

allowed to do what he did, where this wouldn't be allowed anywhere else.

That's why we're doing it. That's why we're finally, finally, finally doing it, and I am so pleased to be able to support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Hon. member, under 29(2)(a)?

Ms Fitzpatrick: Not under 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: Any others under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my honour to stand in support of this bill, a bill which at its essence I have fought for during my entire adult life. I see this bill from many perspectives but two in particular. The first is that every person in this province should know that they are safe, whether that's in going to work, whether that's in going to school, or whether that's in going to a clinic for medical attention.

Perhaps the following might give a graphic of the reality that women live, a double standard in which women have lived most of their lives, a reality which encouraged me to the activism on this issue. I might stand outside an adult entertainment business with a sign that berates men for their choices inside this establishment. However, to access this business, they actually don't have to go to that business and go through a gauntlet of protesters calling them perverts or sex addicts or something like that. However, a woman who is accessing a medical procedure to terminate a pregnancy or to get birth control for whatever reason has been and continues to be subjected to threats which are far worse from protesters, who are trying to impose their value system on them.

The second is from a perspective near and dear to my heart, and that is choice and bullying. In 1974, '75, and '76 I did not choose to be pregnant, but I was. Once I knew that I was pregnant, I took extra care of myself. I ate healthy, as I always did. I exercised, as I always did. I wanted those pregnancies to go to fruition. I did not

get to fruition on two of those pregnancies, not by my choice. Both of those pregnancies were finalized with a D&C after the fetus succumbed to the violent abuse from my ex-husband. A D&C is the same procedure as an abortion. The 1976 pregnancy was completed but with an awful lot of duress as I worried day in and day out whether my ex-husband would come home in a rage and attack me again. In fact, he did come home three and a half weeks before my daughter was born and he attacked me, so I worried in that three and a half weeks. I kept feeling my stomach for movement, to feel the heartbeat, and I worried that I was going to lose that baby as well.

When she was born and I knew she was okay, I had asked the doctor to do a tubal ligation, to tie my tubes. I could not do that without my ex-husband's permission. He gave that permission, but then he withdrew it at the last minute. Fortunately for me, that procedure was already completed. Those pregnancies were some 40 years ago, a different time, a time when women found themselves with no-choice pregnancies, and the only way to protect themselves was to seek a back-alley, unsafe termination of that pregnancy. I support this bill because I see the bullying, controlling, harassing behaviour being openly displayed against women seeking medical attention for termination of a pregnancy at clinics or against medical staff who perform medical procedures.

I am appalled that anyone would think that they have the right to impose their value system on another when they have no idea what it is or what's happened in this particular case or on this person who has to make a choice such as this. This is my body. This is my choice, nobody else's.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

Pursuant to the 2018 main estimates schedule the Legislative Policy Committee on Families and Communities will convene tomorrow morning to consider the estimates of Health in the Rocky Mountain Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m.]

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