



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 8, 2018

Day 26

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Fourth Session

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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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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
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Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (NDP),
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Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
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Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Conklin
Vacant, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake

Party standings:

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

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 8, 2018

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Hon. members, let us each reflect or pray, in our way, about our loved ones and friends. Think about a time when one of them or ourselves experienced emotional anxiety or pain. Let us remind ourselves that while we all have mental health, there are many times when we and our loved ones experience mental illness as well. Why do some illnesses get treatment while some others get judgment?

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 97 grade 6 students from A. Blair McPherson school in the beautiful constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek. They are accompanied by their teachers: Ben Maklowich, Holly Paranich, Hayley Sylvester, and Christie Jedele. I would now ask that they all please stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Minister of Transportation.

I'll go to the next one.

Mr. Mason: Please.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you a powerhouse Conservative woman and my friend, Laila Goodridge. Last week Laila won a hotly contested nomination for the United Conservative Party in Fort McMurray-Conklin. She's got some big, big shoes to fill, but we are confident that she can fill them, and we are so looking forward to the day when she will bring her years of experience to our UCP caucus here in the Legislature. I would ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: I'm ready, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly two constituents of mine who are visiting the Assembly today. Austin Mardon holds a master's degree in both science and education as well as a doctorate in geography. He was elected to the Royal Society of Canada for his academic work in 2014. Dr. Mardon was diagnosed with schizophrenia at the age of 30 and has contributed an impressive body of work on behalf of mentally ill persons since that time. This work has earned him many awards, including the Order of Canada in 2007. He is currently an assistant adjunct professor at the University of Alberta.

Catherine Mardon, his spouse, was born in Oklahoma and earned degrees in agriculture and law there. She also earned a master's degree in theological studies from Newman Theological College. Catherine suffered an accident which left her disabled, and she has advocated strongly on behalf of persons with disabilities, earning a

true grit award from the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta's Circle on Mental Health and Addiction in 2016.

I would ask Austin and Catherine Mardon to please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and to all members here an old friend, Les Hagen. He's the face of and executive director of Action on Smoking and Health. I think he's been around for about a hundred years, Les? No, 40 years. Tobacco is still the leading cause of avoidable death, disability, disease. Les is seated in the public gallery, and I'll ask him to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature. Thanks, Les.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you Shiva Dean, who is the vice-president of corporate operations at Northlands. He's been there for three years and was operations lead during the Fort McMurray wildfire evacuation two years ago. He's joined today by his wife of 20 years, Lisa Dean, who works at Champion Petfoods, and their three children: Nathaniel, Surya, and Joshua. Mr. Dean is also joined by his mother, Sandra, who is visiting from Ontario. They're here to view our proceedings in the House, and I want to thank them for taking the time to come and visit today. I would now ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the House three Albertans. One has already been introduced, actually, by our deputy leader. Laila Goodridge is the candidate for the United Conservatives in Fort McMurray-Conklin. She's joined as well by another 30-year-old candidate who won a hotly contested nomination for the upcoming by-election in Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, Devin Dreeshen, who is a farmer with a great deal of experience in public policy and in government service. We congratulate him and wish him well. In addition, I'd like to welcome Erika Barootes, who just won the hotly contested election for the presidency of the United Conservative Party, a strong, young Edmonton woman committed to public service. We think that these three fine young Albertans represent a new generation of leadership.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'm honoured to introduce special guests who are with us to celebrate Mental Health Week. They are seated in the public gallery. They're a group of committed, passionate mental health therapists with the Alberta Health Services school-based team. The team provides specialized intensive mental health services for students in Edmonton schools. I want to say thank you to them for improving the quality of care for young people, for school staff, and for families. I ask that Rachelle, Erin, Helen, Allison, Nisha, Karen, Angela, Kirsten, Eileen, Teresa, Gabriel,

Carla, Amanda, Marcy, and Christina rise and receive our warm welcome and our appreciation for all your service, please.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, if I might, I have a second introduction, and that's to introduce members of the Alberta Public Health Association who are seated in the public gallery. This association has been working hard to improve the health of Albertans through advocacy, partnerships, and education for 75 years, and I congratulate them on this milestone. I'm inspired by their dedication to advocating for public health, and I thank them for their commitment. The members here today include Lindsay, Angeline, and Aslam. Please rise and receive the warm welcome and gratitude of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you guests from the Canadian Mental Health Association's 211 and the Distress Centre joining us today during Mental Health Week. The 211 is a 24-hour information and referral line that helps connect people to social, health, and government programs and is there to help when someone is in distress. This year's theme for Mental Health Week is Get Loud. This means speaking up to stop the discrimination and the stigma that usually go hand in hand with mental illness. Tell everyone to get loud to maintain positive mental health. I ask that Stephanie Wright, Patricia Skagen-Emokpae, Bronte Diduck, and Stephanie Chard please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Adam McDonald. Adam has walked all the way from Fort McKay, starting on April 30, and, sir, he's making his way to Prince Rupert. Why is he walking? He's trying to bring attention to the fact that we have many, many issues dealing with missing and murdered indigenous women, and he hopes to bring attention to this very subject. Sir, if you would please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Gagan Singh. He's a certified environmental professional, and he's licensed with the Canadian Environmental Certification Approvals Board. Gagan's professional career spans over 13 years, and he's successfully given consulting services for the climate change policy and carbon offset regimes, sustainability and environmental policy and legislation, energy efficiency and conservation, natural resource management, and solid waste management. He also happens to be a new member of the Edmonton-Ellerslie EDA, and I'm proud to call him my friend. I ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other guests today? Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and to all members of the Legislature seven individuals. I would ask that they stand as I mention their names. First, three very important ladies in my life: my wife, Barb, whom you have met before, and with her today is one of our five children, Laura, and one of our seven grandchildren, Annalise. Laura and Annalise are visiting from Langley, British Columbia, where our son-in-law is stationed as an RCMP officer. Yes, they are from B.C., and, yes, they are very much in favour of the Trans Mountain pipeline project. With them are friends visiting from Munich, Germany: Julia and Torsten Schuster and their children Julius and Pauline. Julia and our daughter Laura became very good friends while completing their master's of business degrees in Maastricht, Netherlands, and they continue to visit back and forth and will remain friends for life. I ask that the members would please give them the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you may not have seen that, but she was waving to you.

Members' Statements

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

United Conservative Party Tax Policies

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend conservatives of all stripes gathered in Red Deer to celebrate and debate their shared passions for homophobia, health care privatization, attacking women's rights, and, one of my personal favourites, big tax giveaways for millionaires. You know, I wish I could say that I was surprised, but it's just so predictable. The actions of the UCP this weekend show Albertans loud and clear exactly whose side they're on, and it sure isn't the side of everyday Albertans.

For too long the richest Albertans and wealthiest corporations weren't asked to pay their fair share. Every year ordinary families were asked to do more with less, and in a province that's as rich and as diverse as Alberta, that's simply unacceptable.

Now, just when things are looking up and everyday families finally have a government that supports them, the Conservatives want to rip the rug out from underneath them and send Alberta back to the Dark Ages. Their plan will see everyday working families having to pay more for the services that they rely on while those at the very top, the richest Albertans and wealthiest corporations, all will get a \$700 million tax giveaway. Their plan means deep cuts to things like health care and education just so Conservative insiders and the top 1 per cent can afford an extra round of golf on the taxpayer dime. Albertans have seen this all before, and they rejected this vision and sense of entitlement in the last election.

Mr. Speaker, we're not going to let that happen. Albertans deserve better than an opposition who's only focused on making things easier for their rich friends and insiders. While it's clear that the Conservatives are out of touch with the priorities of everyday Albertans and are only interested in themselves, I'm very proud to say that our government has the backs of ordinary working families across this province, and we will never stop fighting to make life better and more affordable for all Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the member opposite is looking for the Dark Ages, he could find it in the socialist Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Aga Khan's Diamond Jubilee

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this week Alberta is privileged to be welcoming His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan as he visits our province as part of his diamond jubilee visit around the world to celebrate his 60th anniversary since becoming the 49th imam of the Ismaili Shia Muslim jamaat.

Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to have known His Highness for many years. As the federal minister for multiculturalism I was responsible for the Global Centre for Pluralism, a partnership between the federal government and His Highness the Aga Khan, which is offering Canada's successful model of pluralism to parts of the world riven by conflict. This is just one of so many examples of how His Highness and the Ismaili community have contributed to Canada. Indeed, I was honoured while being minister of citizenship and immigration to declare His Highness an honorary Canadian citizen.

Mr. Speaker, Canada was very blessed back some 45 years ago to receive tens of thousands of Ismaili refugees from racism, primarily from east Africa, who came to this country with nothing but who, with the moral support and guidance of the Aga Khan, have managed to go to the very top of Canadian and Alberta society in every domain: in business, in the arts, in the academy.

Mr. Speaker, while we welcome His Highness to Alberta, we join with him in celebrating the innumerable successes of the Ismaili community in Alberta. Alberta can be proud to say that we were the first province to elect a Muslim to the Parliament of Canada right here from Edmonton, an Ismaili.

Mr. Speaker, happy diamond jubilee to His Highness and to all Alberta Ismaili Muslims celebrating this happy occasion.

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

Aga Khan's Diamond Jubilee

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct honour today to rise to welcome His Highness the Aga Khan to Alberta as he prepares to visit Calgary on Thursday. Albertans congratulate His Highness on the occasion of his diamond jubilee. For 60 years as the spiritual leader of the Ismaili Muslim community His Highness has dedicated his life to improving the quality of life of people around the world. His global institutions exemplify the values of pluralism, commitment to education, gender equality, access to quality health care, and building community and civil society in the countries in which they have a presence. Members of the Ismaili community are active leaders in civil society and contribute to Alberta's social, cultural, and economic landscape.

I am proud to work closely with the Ismaili community here in Alberta, a community that sees diversity not as a weakness but as a strength, a community that strives to build an inclusive society, a community dedicated to fostering a pluralistic society and a commitment to helping the most vulnerable amongst us.

This year the Ismaili community in Canada has surpassed their pledge to engage in 1 million hours of voluntary service to improve the quality of life of fellow Canadians. Right here in Alberta over the course of the diamond jubilee year the Ismaili community in Alberta has contributed over 350,000 volunteer hours.

As His Highness the Aga Khan said: we have a duty to leave the world a better place. This quote is something I take inspiration from every day and something I try to live up to in the work our government is doing to make a more inclusive and caring Alberta, where no one is left behind.

We thank His Highness for the gift of the Aga Khan garden, Alberta, and hope that he will be able to join us to enjoy this

magnificent celebration of peace and hope once it is completed in the coming months.

On this joyous occasion we welcome you, Your Highness, to Alberta, and on behalf of all members of this House we wish you diamond jubilee Mubarak.

Oil and Gas Transportation to Tidewater

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to supporting and encouraging pipelines to tidewater from Alberta, the NDP have an abysmal record. We have the video of the Premier before election day in 2015 withholding support for the Northern Gateway pipeline. When the federal government invaded provincial jurisdiction to mandate that the National Energy Board examine upstream emissions on the Energy East pipeline, the NDP rolled over and failed to defend the Constitution and the pipeline. Continuing to sell our product at a discount to only one customer is not common sense. With countless attempts at obstruction by the NDP's fellow travellers, we must fight to move our product to tidewater.

1:50

There is the proposed indigenous-owned Eagle Spirit pipeline to a terminal near Prince Rupert, or we could negotiate with CN Rail for access to their 100-metre right-of-way. It would be easy, with one landowner all the way to the Pacific. But if Trudeau's tanker ban interferes, we can build a pipeline or a railway to Alaska and ship via the Trans-Alaska pipeline system, which is running at the minimal capacity. Then there is the possibility of going east. Forget about Ontario and Quebec. Let's fix the railway and move the product via Churchill. The tank farm sits ready and waiting to move product to Europe, with shorter sailing times over Thunder Bay.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta ingenuity, hard work, determination, and a can-do attitude will ensure that new markets and tidewater access will be achieved for Alberta in spite of the NDP's and Trudeau Liberals' actions speaking louder than their words. If there is a will, there is a way.

Oral Question Period

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

Carbon Levy Increase

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I was in Ottawa to represent the majority of Albertans, who oppose the carbon tax. They oppose the NDP's carbon tax and the proposed Trudeau tax, that would raise the rate here by 67 per cent. We heard at the committee I appeared at that carbon taxes can actually be progressive if they have generous low-income tax credits. Now that this government has decided to stop increasing the rebates as the rate goes higher, will the Premier not admit that the carbon tax will become increasingly regressive in impacting low-income Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased that the member opposite has recognized that, in fact, the climate change leadership plan includes a progressive element to the work that we've done. That's a fundamental commitment that we made. We wanted to ensure that it didn't have a disproportionate effect, that it wasn't a flat tax, like the flat tax that the members opposite are proposing to reinstate as a result of their interesting convention on the weekend. While I appreciate that the member is concerned

about progressive taxation as it relates to the climate leadership plan, I suggest they should . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, that talking point might have been fine for the first \$30 of the NDP carbon tax, but it no longer works for the next \$20, as they raise it to \$50 a tonne, because the government has admitted in their budget that there will be no additional rebates to offset a higher rate. Again I'll ask the Premier: will she not admit that by failing to increase the rebates as the tax goes higher, low-income people will continue to pay more for the energy they consume simply to live normal lives?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, in fact, most people will talk about the fact that a carbon levy like the one that we are bringing in actually is progressive even without the rebates because it is, in fact, higher income earners who actually burn more carbon. The progressive nature of it continues regardless although we will continue to look at other ways in which we can enhance that.

Mr. Speaker, it really is rather rich for the member opposite to be suggesting this when his party just passed a plan to give the top 1 per cent of Albertans a \$750 million tax cut. I mean, I think they should really figure out . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: For the record, Mr. Speaker, high-income Albertans are actually paying less now than they used to. Income tax revenues are down since the NDP raised the rates. That's what happens when you disincentivize economic activity.

Mr. Speaker, the experts on the panel that I appeared at in Ottawa yesterday talked about how carbon taxes can be great in that they replace so-called costly regulations. Interesting idea. Could the Premier please identify a single environmental regulation that her government has repealed as a result of the introduction of the carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our carbon levy works together with a whole other plan to reduce our emissions. That's what we need to do as responsible stewards of the environment, and it's also what we need to do to get a pipeline to tidewater, something which, the members opposite will recall, they were unable to do after nine years. The reality is that our climate leadership plan is focused on getting a pipeline built, a pipeline that will fund education, health care, all those things that the members opposite appear to be not quite as much in support of now as they were right before last weekend.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Carbon Levy Provincial Debt

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has again invoked the notion of social licence, that if we punish Alberta consumers for heating their homes and driving to work, we'll somehow get a pipeline built. Could the Premier please tell us if she can identify a single provincial government, municipal government, political party, First Nation, or environmental organization that has gone

from opposition to coastal pipelines to support for coastal pipelines as a result of the NDP carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I can do is talk about our ability to talk about a responsible climate leadership plan and a cap on emissions and all the things that go with the incredible work that the province of Alberta and industry in Alberta are doing to meet our responsibilities and how that has been part of the conversation we've had across this country and in B.C., where support for Kinder Morgan is well over 50 per cent and has grown at least 20 per cent in the last six months, and it's because of the good work that we have been doing here in Edmonton and with industry. We believe in making progress on this file, and I'm very proud of how it's been working.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Kenney: Well, I'll take it from the Premier's failure to answer the question that there is no organization that's moved from no to yes on pipelines as a result of the carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, in Ottawa yesterday I also heard from carbon tax proponents that they can be revenue neutral when there are offsetting cuts in other tax rates to make up for the higher government revenues coming in from carbon taxes. Could the Premier please identify what tax rate she cut to ensure the revenue neutrality of Alberta's NDP carbon tax?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, what we did was that we cut the small-business tax rate to 2 per cent, so that worked out well. You know, I know the member was in Ottawa rigorously fighting against any effort to combat climate change. Here's another thing that the member said when he was in Ottawa just a couple of years earlier. It's a good one: when it comes to pipelines, no project is a national priority. That's what he said then. Say one thing and do another: it reminds me very much of the UCP convention that we saw on the weekend. Despite what the UCP says, behind the curtain things are a lake of fire.

Mr. Kenney: Because all of those pipelines are a priority.

Mr. Speaker, the University of Calgary's economics think tank, the School of Public Policy, has released a report showing how devastating the massive increase in the public debt of this government is for future generations. They found that a 16-year-old in 2023 can expect to pay the equivalent of \$42,000 over her lifetime in additional personal income taxes to pay the interest on the public debt. Is the government proud that they're going to force a young Albertan to pay \$42,000 to bankers and bondholders for their debt?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we are proud of is that young Albertans, as they leave school, will not be spending \$45,000 in the first four years after they leave high school to pay for their postsecondary education, and that's because we made a decision to freeze tuition and to maintain funding in our postsecondary system because we know that that is fundamental to supporting our young people, and it is also fundamental to growing our economy. We're going to invest in the future. We are not going to try to cut our way to prosperity for the top 1 per cent.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Provincial Debt

Mr. Kenney: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, does the Premier not understand that today's deficits are tomorrow's taxes? Has the government conducted any assessment of the long-term transfer of wealth from future generations to today's generation because of their massive deficit spending?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, what we have said – we made a choice when we were elected. We made a choice that we would not make a bad situation worse. We would not follow the recession. We would lead the recovery, and as a result things are starting to look up. Not all, but they are starting to look up: 90,000 new jobs, leading the country in economic growth. This is how you work your way out of this kind of problem. You do not cut your way out. You do not make Albertans pay for the mistakes of generations past, and you do not give tax breaks to the top 1 per cent.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, shortly after the budget I asked the following question. I didn't get an answer then. Perhaps the government has been able to do their homework since. Could the government tell us: how much do they plan to spend on interest payments to bankers and bondholders as a result of the \$96 billion debt included in their budget?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've answered that question in the past, and that is fine. It's interesting. When it comes to doing one's job, one of the things that official oppositions often do is introduce a shadow budget, and they talk about what they would do differently to deal with the fiscal pressures that are facing this government, that are real. But they never did it, and they said it was because they wanted to wait for their membership to tell them what to do. Now they've decided that they're not going to listen to their membership. They're going to write their own policy. I'm wondering if the member opposite is now prepared to tell the people of Alberta what he would cut to make things different.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, according to this University of Calgary study almost half of the burden of higher taxes as a result of the NDP's debt will be borne by the 16- to 35-year-old age group. Those over 65, on the other hand, will pay less than 3 per cent of the total tax burden. This constitutes an intergenerational transfer of wealth. I'd like to ask the Premier. Does she think that it is fair, just, or progressive to transfer wealth from future generations to pay for our overspending here today?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that transferred debt to future generations was the failure of the previous Conservative government to invest in infrastructure, for instance. We had an infrastructure debt and deficit which was gargantuan, which regular Albertans paid the price for each and every day when they tried to access the services that they and their families relied upon. That kind of management doesn't work. It is time that we not have our teachers wake up in the morning to check the price of oil to see if they're going to be able to go to work to teach our kids. We can do better, and that's exactly what we're doing.

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

Violence Prevention

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every Albertan and indeed every human being deserves to live and work free from violence or the threat of violence. Lately I've seen a disturbing rise in the number of threats directed against female politicians. Whether they're being threatened because they hold differing political views or have spoken about their Me Too experiences or simply because they are women in public spaces, it's wrong and we need to do more to stop it. To the Minister of Justice: do the police and the justice system have the resources to identify and prosecute threats of violence and to support the targets of those threats?

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. Of course, it's absolutely critical to our government and to our policing partners as well to ensure that every person across Alberta is able to feel safe in their homes, in their communities, regardless of their gender. We absolutely continue to work with our police partners to ensure that they have the resources necessary to service all different communities because this is absolutely a critical issue for both us and them.

Mr. Fraser: Threats of violence are disgusting enough, but we recently saw in Toronto what can happen when the kind of hate that motivates these threats is allowed to fester. Ultimately, the people responsible for these acts are the people who commit them. We need to ask ourselves, though, if there is more that we can do to prevent online hate from becoming a real-life tragedy. We can try to stop the radicalization of these men through measures like community intervention or, if necessary, police intervention. To the same minister: is your government working with the police, federal and municipal governments, and community leaders to intervene before the violence escalates to physical violence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the incredibly important question. I could go on for considerable length about this one. We do work with police, with the ASSIST team, to ensure that we're assessing threats throughout the province. Another really important portion of this is ensuring that we're investing in those community resources so that all members of our community have access to the services they need, including mental health services, when they need them and including the ability to access other members of the community so they can feel like part of the community, which helps a lot with this radicalization.

Thank you.

Mr. Fraser: I've spoken about it before, but I want to be very clear. What we say in this Chamber matters. Our tone, our words, and the example that we set for Albertans plays a role in fostering or preventing expressions of hate or threats of violence. I commend all sides of this House for speaking out against violence, but this isn't an issue that we can afford to stop talking about. We must be sure that Albertans know that there is no place for hate in this province. To the Premier, respectfully, I'm asking for a nonpartisan answer. Will you work with us as legislators to establish an all-party committee so that we can address this on an ongoing basis?

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I have to say that one of the things that I think speaks most to my

heart about this side of the House is how many women have been involved in this government to make sure that we create laws, that we create an environment, and that we create a culture where women are respected in every workplace. I have to say that part of that starts with the tone at the top with our Premier, who made sure that we had 50 per cent of the people on the ballot as women because 50 per cent of Albertans are women. When I hear other members of this House refer to things like feminism as the F-word, well, I guess that's better than when they called it cancer, but I do have to say that I will not back down. I will keep fighting for women. You're certainly welcome to be part of that, but we don't need an all-party committee. We need a government that's on the side of women, and we've got it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, just again, many times I've mentioned it, but we're about to move to question 5. There are no preambles under our standing orders that we've discussed here. As we move forward, please act accordingly.

The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Tax Policy

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the first things we did as a government was to reinstitute a progressive tax in Alberta. My constituents would like to know: what has returning to a progressive tax meant for the government and for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Progressive tax is what exists in every province in Canada, and the federal government as well uses a progressive income tax system. We are simply asking those who make more money to pay a little more to support the vital programs and services in this province. A progressive tax results in more stable revenue for government to fund those important programs and services while building the infrastructure like schools, hospitals, highways, and bridges that all Albertans need and rely on.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the UCP convention over the weekend the party's membership voted to return Alberta to the flat tax, one of the many regressive policies introduced at the UCP blast from the past. To the same minister: why has this government chosen to move away from the flat tax of the previous government?

Mr. Ceci: That was a proud moment, when I moved away from the flat tax in June of 2015. Returning to the flat tax benefits only Alberta's wealthiest to the tune of a \$700 million tax cut for the richest 1 per cent in Alberta. That's people making over \$300,000 a year, Mr. Speaker. Albertans just get stuck with the bill. Regular Albertans will pay it through cuts to our kids' classrooms and longer ER wait times. While the members opposite want to fight for those at the top and their friends, we stand for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that getting rid of the flat tax has benefited Albertans, what effect would reversing this policy have?

Mr. Ceci: It would be devastating, Mr. Speaker. The UCP's plan to blow a \$5 billion hole in the budget with no plan to pay for it will only make the problems in this province get worse. On the flat tax

specifically they would have to cut nearly the entire budget allocated to the children's intervention ministry, or they would cut the entire budget allocated to home care for our elderly. Either way, Albertans lose, and the UCP and their rich friends and insiders benefit.

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

Tobacco Reduction and Industry Lobbyists

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The framework convention on tobacco control is a public health treaty prohibiting the signatories, including Canada and Alberta, from meeting behind closed doors with tobacco lobbyists. In opposition the ND caucus railed against insider lobbying by tobacco companies, and now they do continue to bring about the multimillion-dollar lawsuit against big tobacco. It's surprising, then, that now the NDP government appears to be welcoming these lobbyists, including the Premier's former press secretary Sally Housser, into its backrooms. To the Premier: how many times has she met with lobbyist Sally Housser in the last year, and what was discussed?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me be perfectly clear. My understanding is that with the exception of one former staff member in the Health minister's office who met once inadvertently, there have been no meetings with tobacco lobbyists on the matter of tobacco by anybody in our government.* We are committed to making progress on reducing tobacco use across this province. That is why we banned the use of menthol cigarettes soon after we got elected, and we will continue to work very, very hard on that matter.

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have reliable sources that say otherwise. I'd like the Premier to tell us in which other departments tobacco lobbyists have met with her members and table the subjects, the places, the dates, and the times of those meetings in other departments in your government.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I will say is that it is a bit disturbing the kinds of suggestions that are being made without any kind of evidence behind them. What I can tell you is that as far as we can tell, there was one inadvertent meeting very early on in the mandate, and it has never happened since. For people to make suggestions like that is not very responsible, quite frankly, and I expect more from the member opposite. The reality is that there is nothing to table because we've been following the rules, and we always follow the rules, and we have not been meeting with tobacco lobbyists.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government continues to stall on the implementation of the 2013 Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act. Some provisions will be dropped soon if this is not proclaimed. Why are you delaying, and when will you fully implement the tobacco legislation that we passed almost five years ago?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really proud that over the last few years Alberta has introduced tougher tobacco laws, making it possible for us to move more swiftly on reducing

*See page 1081, left column, paragraph 15

tobacco use, and we've seen success with our youth. We've seen reduced revenues for tobacco sales as well, which speaks to there being fewer people purchasing tobacco, and cigarettes have minimum package sizing, et cetera. And as the Premier said, we did ban menthol and received a reward from Smoke-free Alberta for that, that we're very grateful for. We understand that there is more work to be done on some other areas, including vaping, and that's why we're working with the federal government to make sure that we're compliant.

Midwifery Services

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, women in this province are increasingly seeking the services offered by midwives. Midwives play a valuable role in supporting the health of mothers and their babies. Not only that, but midwifery helps save the system costs associated with low-risk births. Minister, the opposition has been advocating for years for women to have better access to this service. Will the government finally remove the cap restricting midwife access so that more women can make use of this cost-saving measure?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker and for the question. Today they're advocating for increased expansion of services. Yesterday and probably five minutes from now they'll be advocating for more cuts to health care. I'm sure glad that we have a government that's working to expand funding and increase the number of courses of care. Every single year this government has increased courses of care by 400. That's 400 women who are getting the support, 400 families who are getting the support, 400 babies or more sometimes who are getting the support when they are exercising that right to choose. We are excited that we are supporting this instead of moving for deep ideological cuts like the members opposite.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, it's a pretty sad day when the Health minister doesn't know that this is a cost-saving measure. Given that women all over this province are giving birth and given that the Associate Minister of Health agreed with the Official Opposition last year that midwifery has the possibility of actually helping to save dollars in the system – tell your minister – Minister, last year you brought forward what you described as a stable model, yet wait-lists are still increasing. Will you finally take our advice and remove the cap?

Ms Hoffman: Well, as we've seen, Mr. Speaker, I respect the fact that women are increasing their right to choose a midwife, and we support that expansion. The arguments around financial are arguments that, frankly, are one part of this question but aren't actual sound and scientific evidence. While I appreciate that there is the possibility that women are potentially having home births and if there is an OB who is not working at the same time, there could be savings, in actuality often we've seen that there are increases. But that isn't what's driving this. What's driving this is making sure that we support women in exercising their choices around their birth plans.

Mrs. Pitt: I'll table evidence later, Mr. Speaker, that shows substantial savings by using midwifery.

Given that more and more women are finding that this service is valuable and supply is just not meeting the demand and given that pregnancy is nine months and women really can't wait, Minister, when will you finally remove the cap and make this service a priority for women in our province?

Ms Hoffman: Well, Mr. Speaker, we saw what happened when the now Official Opposition was in government and they removed caps on things like daily dispensing fees. We saw seniors have to pay out of pocket every single day to get their prescriptions refilled. Sometimes people say: well, if they're not seeing a doctor and they're seeing a pharmacist instead, maybe the costs will go down. That isn't what's driving decision-making in this. What's driving it is ensuring that we get women the care they need. We're working to expand that by 400 courses every year. We certainly appreciate that there is potential in some situations for there to be cost savings, but we also know that that can't be the only driver, because we're not going to lay off nurses and ob-gyns to offset these costs. We're going to continue to expand access, and that's why we have.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Crown Prosecution Practice Protocol

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October 2016 the Justice minister unveiled her triage policy, and I quote: we had to respond to ensure that cases were not being lost in court. Unquote. In the following six months the Crown abandoned 200 criminal prosecutions. Minister, another 14 months have gone by. What is the total number of charges dropped to date, and what does this say about the minister's triage policy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member has alluded to, in the wake of the Jordan decision it was absolutely necessary for the government to respond. We've responded to that in two ways. The triage policy enables us to ensure that the cases which we are dropping tend more towards the low end of the spectrum rather than serious and violent, dangerous offences to ensure that we're using the justice system most effectively. The second way we've dealt with that is by investing in the justice system. I wish the opposition members would support that investment.

Mr. Taylor: I'd still like to know what that number is.

Given that the total number of criminal charges abandoned since the fall of 2016 is likely well over 500 by now and given that if the minister's triage policy has not cleared the court backlog in almost two years, it has failed to do its job, Minister, are you willing to make the changes needed to ensure that the triage policy works?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, as the member is no doubt aware, the population of the province of Alberta continues to expand. What that means is that there continues to be a higher demand for services as we move forward. Because the justice system had been underfunded for decades under the previous government, we suffered from a serious backlog in terms of funding to different areas of the system. We're addressing that, again, in two ways, by making sure we're using the justice system in the most effective possible manner and by making sure that we're funding the things that we need to fund in order to make it work efficiently. We'll continue to look at that as we . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't sound like the triage protocol is actually working that well. Given that the minister said yesterday that her triage policy "intends to prioritize serious and violent cases" and given that every time an alleged murderer or sexual offender walks free, it hurts Albertans and shocks Albertans, Minister, will you please either provide us with evidence that your triage policy is working or come up with a solution that works for all involved?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's quite clear to us that every time a matter isn't adjudicated in court, every time someone walks free without the victim or the family of the victim even getting to see a day in court, that hurts all Albertans, and it hurts the justice system in that perception as well. That's why we have brought in measures to ensure that the justice system is able to focus on those serious and violent offences. When the Jordan decision came down, the system had been underfunded for so long that we were too far behind to catch up with just resources. We're also ensuring that we're putting additional resources in. It's pretty rich for them when . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Electricity Regulated Rate Cap

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, Albertans received a mailer telling them that the NDP government will cover them when the market price for electricity exceeds 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour. Today at the Public Accounts meeting the assistant deputy minister confirmed that the NDP government paid \$9 million in April 2018 to cover higher prices. To the Minister of Energy: why do you force taxpayers to subsidize the electricity bills of ratepayers to cover up your failed ideological policies? Taxpayers and ratepayers are the same.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we are changing the system. It's a holistic change because the system that we inherited was broken. As we go through the stages, it's important to help educate Albertans on what those changes are, what they will look like. One of the promises we made was capping rates at 6.8 cents should those rates rise above that, and it's important for Albertans to understand how that rate cap is going to work.

2:20

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the Energy department's 2016-17 annual report says that the cost of subsidizing all of the power bills is currently unknown, yet the NDP have budgeted \$74.3 million this year to cover the electricity costs over and above 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour, how would the NDP government know that \$74.3 million would be enough to cover higher electricity prices since they don't know how much it will cost?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we look at forward prices. We take in a lot of information from third-party sources to look at the trends for electricity going forward. That's one of the ways we come up with that. I would take exception that we don't know the costs. The costs are actually in our budget projections. All they have to do is open up the budget and have a look.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister didn't know who Neil McCrank was during the budget estimates and given that Neil McCrank sued the government for maligning his reputation and that with McCrank being under indemnification, the AUC ended up paying his legal fees, Minister, how much did this lawsuit cost taxpayers, and did you admit the mistake and apologize? How much did you settle for?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, all of that information is publicly available. You just have to look either on our website or in the budget projections.

But I have to say, you know, last weekend hearing about the plans to abolish the carbon levy, last night's discussion about the capacity market, things we're looking to change, that industry wants to know what your take is on the capacity market, because they're very worried.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Athabasca University

Mr. Piquette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Athabasca University provides Albertans with a high-quality university education no matter where they live. In my riding it is also a pillar of our community, providing high-quality jobs and educational opportunities. The staff of AU and the greater Athabasca community are grateful for the support our government has provided to keep the university strong in Athabasca. However, recently there have been concerns over professional jobs being lost to big urban centres. What is the government doing to make sure that Athabasca University is sustainable and that jobs in Athabasca are protected?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. He's been a powerful advocate for Athabasca University and the town of Athabasca. We're proud of the work that we've done to put AU back on track and to keep it in the town of Athabasca. We commissioned a third-party review, written by Dr. Ken Coates, and we've been working with AU to implement its recommendations. We've made clear that as progress is being made, jobs in the town of Athabasca must be protected. The Coates report calls for enhancing the role of Athabasca University in Athabasca and states that "AU should be able to maintain if not expand the size of its operations in the Town of Athabasca."

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that under the previous Conservative government there were grave concerns about roller coaster funding and the long-term financial sustainability of AU, what has the government done to provide financial stability?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, we know that one of the favourite Conservative pastimes was making cuts to postsecondary education, and that made the problems at Athabasca University worse. We've been proud to increase our funding by 2 per cent for our universities and colleges every year that we've been in government, including at Athabasca University. We were very pleased to see that the financial reports from AU last year were positive, and thanks to our support, they are now on much more stable financial footing. If the Conservatives ever got the chance again, they'd make more cuts and undo the progress that we've made at Athabasca University.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Coates report provides a way forward for Athabasca University to thrive in the years to come, what is the minister doing to make sure that the third-party report is being followed through on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're working closely with Athabasca University's new president and board chair to see this work through. AU has been consulting and recently presented a strategic plan, which outlines a path forward and clear goals and objectives through 2022. I'll be visiting Athabasca in the coming weeks and providing further updates on our government's support for Athabasca University, and I look forward to having the hon. member there with me.

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

Carbon Trunk Line and the Sturgeon Refinery

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is the potential for benefit to Albertans from our investment in the Sturgeon refinery, but there are also substantial risks. Earlier today in Public Accounts I had the opportunity to ask the Department of Energy about one specific risk, and that is the status of the Alberta carbon trunk line. Now, you'll recall that this project is meant to support enhanced oil recovery while sequestering carbon. Unfortunately, we learned that this project still does not have financing and still does not have a start date for construction. To the Minister of Energy: what happens if the Alberta carbon trunk line isn't built by the time the Sturgeon refinery starts full operations later this year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the carbon trunk line is part of that project. You know, we work with the North West upgrader. We're looking forward to the opening of that refinery. It's going to be a good project for Alberta, and we'll continue to monitor the results as we go forward.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's about the furthest thing from an answer that I've seen in this House for some time, and that's saying something.

Mr. Speaker, in my risk management days we used to say that a problem is when a risk becomes a reality, so I'd say that the minister, unfortunately, has a problem on her hands. Given that the Alberta carbon trunk line was an integral part of the original business case for Alberta's investment in the Sturgeon refinery and given that the project not only hasn't gotten started, it hasn't even secured financing, to the Minister of Energy one more time: if the refinery is forced to emit carbon instead of capturing it, how much will they pay in carbon tax, and does that affect the return to Albertans from this investment?

The Speaker: Hon. member, you're going to have a second supplemental. Maybe you didn't hear at the beginning. I found a thread, a number of preambles in that question. So when you get the next chance, please reduce them.

The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we've been clear. We have two projects right now, the Shell Quest project

and certainly the North West upgrader project. We've been clear that we would continue with those. They were both continuing contracts from the previous government. I can assure the member that I'll get him some specifics. I don't have those specifics before me.

We're looking with interest at the costs of carbon capture. We do know that in places like Saskatchewan the cost is about a hundred dollars a tonne. We're doing many projects here for far less than that, and that's good for Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given during estimates we learned that the price of the Sturgeon refinery has gone up yet another \$300 million, to \$9.7 billion, and may go further over budget and given we still don't have a date for full-scale production and given the likelihood of additional costs from the carbon levy, from delays to the Alberta carbon trunk line, one more time to the Minister of Energy: if the Alberta carbon trunk line is delayed or never built, will that tip the scales for the Sturgeon refinery from profit to loss?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I promised before, I will get back to the member on that matter. I don't have the facts before me.

But I do know that the North West refinery is slowly ramping up. It takes about a year. So far it's been successful. I've seen examples of low-sulphur diesel, which is going to be good for us. Again, we are looking, with interest, at the two carbon capture projects, and I'll have more to say once I find out some more information.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Seniors' Housing

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Member for Stony Plain said, "We know that people are healthier – physically, mentally, and emotionally – when they can transition into care in their own communities." The Health minister, in response, said, "We are committed to helping Albertans lead healthy and safe lives in their homes and in their communities." And just yesterday the seniors minister said, "I know they want to age in their communities, close to their loved ones" and "I know seniors across the province want to stay in their communities as they age." If the minister and this NDP government really believe this, what happened to the Berwyn Autumn Lodge and their ability to age in their community?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member mentions the Member for Stony Plain, I want to make sure that she knows that our thoughts are with her today as she undergoes this battle.

I had the opportunity of visiting the Autumn Lodge with the local MLA, the Minister of Energy, just before Christmas and had a lovely visit with some of the residents there. We also worked to make sure that the housing management body knew that there were some additional supports that we could put in place to help them protect that facility if that was their priority. They chose to exercise their own choice on that matter, Mr. Speaker, but we've certainly worked to try to support it through the housing management body.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Likewise, our thoughts are with the Member for Stony Plain.

Given that a seniors' facility, owned by the Alberta government, in DeBolt was closed due to a creek bank sliding near it and given that seniors were moved out, some of them right out of the community, and given that this issue has been going on for two years – and I now understand that the ministry just came up with half a solution by saying that they might cover moving and renovations of the buildings – and given that there's no word yet on the acquisition of the land needed, what the community needs to know is: who's responsible for purchasing the land, and will the seniors in DeBolt be able to access the same opportunity to age in their communities as they did before?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, and we appreciate the question. It's certainly one that we've been asking with the housing management body. We respect their local authority over this matter, Mr. Speaker. We've given them resources to consider how they might be able to support movement or transition for those individuals who are impacted, but certainly we respect the fact that the housing management body is the one making this decision. We've been working to try to give them tools to enable them to make the decisions they feel are best.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the DeBolt facility is actually owned by the provincial government, not the housing management, but given that there have been seniors' facilities shut down and that this government keeps talking about the lack of seniors' facilities, how are you going to make up for the shortfall due to the aging population along with the stress of existing facilities that are shutting down?

Ms Hoffman: The member is right to note that there is significant stress and deferred maintenance in this province because we saw that happen over many, many years of budgets being cut any time the price of oil dropped, people being laid off, and we are working diligently to try to address that massive backlog of deferred maintenance, that we've inherited from decades of Conservative governments, Mr. Speaker. We're investing in affordable housing, including affordable housing for seniors in lodges. We've got the biggest investment in that in more than a generation, and we're proud to do that. I wish the members opposite would vote for it every now and then instead of just asking for more resources and then voting down every single budget.

Hospital Helipads

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I received an e-mail from a constituent in Westlock. Last year he observed for months on end as the work at the hospital helipad went on and on and on. "They could have built a whole hospital in the time that effort took," he said. Apparently, the helipad at the Westlock hospital is still not operational, putting the lives of my constituents at risk when they need to medevac to Edmonton or be brought in from an accident scene. Can the Minister of Health explain what is holding up this critical life-saving facility?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With regard to this specific helipad I'll have to get back to the hon. member, but I can tell you that I am aware of two that are undergoing some

significant renovations. This is in line with changes that have been made by Transport Canada around helipads. There is a backup plan always, any time they have to decommission one and do renovations or build a new one, to use an adjacent facility, which would sometimes mean a nearby field or a nearby airport. With regard to this very specific one I'll have to get back to the hon. member, but please do know that it is our priority to ensure patient safety, no matter what.

Mr. van Dijken: Given, Mr. Speaker, that there is about \$7 million left in this now six-year program of \$26 million and given that hospitals around Alberta have had their helipads compromised during a repair schedule that was supposed to be done three years ago, can the minister assure this House that the delays in repairs are over and the hospital helipad work will conclude this year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, that is our hope, but of course patient safety needs to be the number one priority. We need to comply with Transport Canada regulations around these, and I don't control the inspectors who do the final sign-off. Certainly, our goal is to ensure that we have helipads close to health facilities, close to where residents are throughout the province. We are investing in this, and we're committed to ensuring that we have safety throughout our province. We're expanding investment in EMS services as well. On this side of the House we're investing in the health care services that Albertans count on.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that the Fort McMurray hospital used to just land the medevacs in the parking lot and since the order came down medevacs in Fort McMurray as well as in Westlock have had to land at the airport and take an ambulance downtown, losing critical time, when will Westlock and Fort McMurray be able to land their helicopters back at the hospital to help save lives?

Ms Hoffman: Well, thank you very much for the question. Again, Transport Canada changed some of their regulations around where helicopters were allowed to land and how they had to be provided safely. Certainly, we understand that you may have some questions for folks in Ottawa. I understand that your leader likes to spend time there. Maybe he can ask them on your behalf. On this side of the House we're working to comply with the safety in parameters to ensure that people, no matter where they live in the province, can be safe, can be transported safely. On this side of the House we're investing in health care instead of pushing for deep ideological cuts, just like your membership voted for on the weekend.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Wildfire Season Preparedness

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've arrived at two years since the fires ravaged Fort McMurray. Although we recall the mismanagement of resources that occurred by the government and the ill-preparedness, we now have concrete numbers that show a \$20 million reduction in firefighting supplies, services, and equipment before the fire. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: how can you defend that to the people of Fort McMurray that lost everything?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and for the member's question. You know, without a doubt, protecting Alberta's

communities and citizens is a top priority. That's why we continue to invest in forest fire fighting equipment, in people, in contractors, why we've made changes to legislation to ensure that our communities stay safe, why we've tripled the investment in FireSmart so our communities right across the province stay safe. We'll continue doing that good work.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, fire season is here, and there are already fire bans appearing in parts of our province. On May 3, 2016, the Premier said that this government was ready. In Fort McMurray there are still 2,700 outstanding claims on insurance two years later despite our NDP government being prepared. What assurances do Albertans have that this government is prepared for another disaster?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I stated on the first question, you know, this government is committed to the protection of Alberta's communities, protection of our forests, protection of infrastructure, protection of our citizens, and that will continue. We've taken steps. We've taken all the recommendations on the Flap Top Complex, for instance. All those recommendations have been implemented. We're looking at all other recommendations that have taken place in reports for the past years as well to ensure that we do everything we can, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, last year I was given confidential information that during the opening day of the fire the command centre had been locked out of the computer and was unable to contain emergency codes. Given that the computer had to be reset by someone in Edmonton, to the minister: what actions have you taken to ensure that this type of incident does not happen again?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I was just up in Fort Mac, actually, a couple of weeks ago – and I did see the member there – to see some of the things that were happening, the growth, the building. There's still a lot to do. A lot of houses need to be rebuilt. But one of the things: after every single disaster that we have in this province, we do a postassessment report. We had 21 recommendations come from KPMG. A lot of those have already been fulfilled, and a lot of that centres around communication, which is key in these kinds of instances. Also, I put a bill to the House where I talk about communication and understanding roles and responsibilities of local officials on the ground, where the hand-off is from local officials to us.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Edmonton LRT Valley Line West Leg

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The proposed west leg of the valley line LRT is a critical piece of infrastructure for residents of Edmonton-Meadowlark and all of west Edmonton. On March 23 Edmonton city council finalized the LRT plan, with a majority of councillors supporting it. To the Minister of Transportation: has the city of Edmonton submitted their finalized proposal, and when can we expect to see a formal agreement with the province?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for the question. Our officials in Transportation have received a draft business case for the west valley LRT project from the city of Edmonton. We're currently in the process of reviewing that. You know, I want to say that our budget includes an investment of \$3 billion, split between Edmonton and Calgary, for LRT projects over the next 10 years. I want to assure the House that we're committed to bringing this form of clean, efficient transportation to both of our major cities.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Recent changes to the design of the west leg of the valley line have increased the original proposed costs of the project. Will this have any effect on the city's ability to get the funding they require?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. We have a great working relationship with the city of Edmonton on this, and we're committed to working with them to finalize the details. I want to assure the House that the financial commitment that the government has made to the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary will stand, and I'm sure that they will be able to move ahead on the construction of this line with the funding that we provided.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Minister. Once again to the same minister: if your department accepts city council's proposal, how soon can we expect to see this project ready for procurement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to indicate to the hon. member that while the government of Alberta is prepared to provide significant funding to both Edmonton and Calgary for their LRT projects, these projects are their projects, and the schedules are determined by those cities as they move forward. I'm sure that the city of Edmonton will be able to move this project forward in a timely fashion, and we're there to support that.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

2:40

Midwifery Services

(continued)

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to follow up on good questions put earlier by my colleague from Airdrie to the Minister of Health. I believe that all members recognize the great services provided by midwives to women giving birth and that often this can help to save the health care system funds and provide more options to expectant mothers. Because I'm new here, I must confess that I don't understand why there's a cap imposed by the government with respect to midwifery. Could the minister please advise why, and how can this be changed to increase access to this efficient option for childbirth?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question, the opportunity to discuss the way the Health budget works a little bit. We do have some folks who are fee-for-service. We do have some folks who are salaried within Health. Certainly, within midwives, midwives are paid on a course of care, so they are paid, essentially, a fee for service, but the reason why we have a budget is to ensure that we can give certainty to those midwives that they will have opportunities to engage in those courses of care and that the

government will be in a position to pay for it. We certainly appreciate the important role that midwives play and are proud that we've expanded the number of courses of care by 400 every year over the last four years.

Mr. Kenney: Given that I appreciate the minister's thoughtful and substantive answer, Mr. Speaker, what could be done to increase access to this important service so that women who would like the assistance of a midwife in childbirth can have access to that?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for speaking in this House about women's choice, women's choice around accessing the type of health care provider that they choose to be able to support them during that period of their lives. We are certainly pleased that on this side of the House we've increased investment in health care every single year, that we are planning on hiring more health care workers, not laying them off and sending them onto the streets, and that we honour the women who are exercising their choice around midwifery services by increasing funding in this area every year.

Mr. Kenney: I'm not sure that was an answer, Mr. Speaker, so would the minister please consider lifting the cap on midwifery services to ensure greater access for Alberta women to midwives for expectant mothers?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question and the proposal. We certainly are interested in ensuring that we have a well-funded health care system throughout Alberta. We've got a very good working relationship with the association that represents midwives, and I think they appreciate that during an economic downturn, rather than repeating mistakes of the past, bringing deep cuts to health care, we've increased opportunities for midwives and for women to choose a midwife. We respect the fact that this is a choice women are making. Every year we've increased it by 400 additional courses of care. We have a government that's stable, and we're working to expand those opportunities for women instead of moving with rash ideological cuts. I appreciate that they want to lift the cap, but where would they cut . . .

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

Hon. members, we'll proceed in 30 seconds.

Members' Statements

(continued)

United Conservative Party Candidate Selection

Mr. Fildebrandt: Some of my colleagues here will know that I've fallen back into the bad old habit of smoking. Over the last week I made the decision to quit, though. For those of you who know me well, old habits die hard. There are some times in life when you need to know when to quit, like smoking, and I'll admit, to those who have seen me hidden by the east entrance, that I haven't always been successful.

But sometimes in life knowing when not to quit is even more important. When Albertans have their backs up against the wall, we don't tuck tail and run. We put our heads down and charge like a bull at the Strathmore Stampede. When I was told that I would not be allowed to run in my own constituency because of affirmative action gender quotas, I didn't quit, but when I was told to just keep quiet and

keep my head down until all this passed, I did. It wasn't in my character to do so, and it was a mistake. I allowed the scheming backroom operators to dictate my behaviour as they are now dictating the behaviour of others.

I was the first member of this House to call for the unification of conservatives, but I'm honestly not sure if history will judge that to have been the right thing to do anymore. Conditional for supporting unification was the grassroots guarantee that local members would select their own candidates and that members would set the policies of the party. If you believe in democracy, then you accept that you lose a vote sometimes on policy or on your hand-picked candidates.

I can't be whipped. As long as I've been an MLA, I have always voted freely and have broken with the party whip on more than one occasion. One of the things I'm grateful for right now is that there is no party whip telling me how to vote or even not how to vote. The only people who get to tell me how to vote are the people of Strathmore-Brooks. Party backroomers may have stripped the members in my constituency of the right to vote for the candidate of their choice, but they have not stripped me of my voice to say: I don't quit.

Rail Transportation Backlog

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, it's certainly not news that Canada has a serious issue with shipping via rail, and that problem has been coming to a crisis point for several years. Recent reports indicate that not only grain and energy producers are having a difficult time with the critical shortage of rail cars, but it's also severely impacting the forestry industry.

As the minister noted in this House, he has heard from forestry stakeholders that the mills are having difficulties getting their products to customers. They're having to take extraordinary measures to avoid unplanned shutdowns. Now, that's not good news for anyone. In fact, last winter only one of the companies surveyed got more than half of its cars on time. All other mills were under 50 per cent, with the worst-off mill only getting 14 per cent of the cars they ordered.

Now, how on earth can a company function effectively if they can't get the majority of their products to their consumers? Without access to rail, companies are incurring ballooning costs due to warehousing their inventory and hiring more and more trucks to prevent inventories from piling up at mills and warehouses. Mr. Speaker, these companies need to get their products to market, many of which have already been paid for.

This is a crisis not only for the energy sector, but for forestry, agriculture, and numerous other sectors that count on railways to ship their goods. While it's understandable that weather can cause havoc upon the prairies, especially in the winter, the lack of infrastructure such as engines, grain cars, flat decks, and even staff to run them – all need investment to curb this problem. After all, our two major rail companies have been operating in this climate since the 1900s, so I'm sure they've learned a thing or two about prairie winters.

Mr. Speaker, we are at the tipping point here, and so far all of the Band-Aid solutions by government and industry are falling far short of solution, especially for the forestry industry.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 16
Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure
Statutes Amendment Act, 2018

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce Bill 16, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Statutes Amendment Act, 2018. Amendments to the act will ensure electoral fairness by requiring that all election campaigns are subject to the same spending limit. We are acting in continuation of what we've been doing from day one, making sure that ordinary Albertans decide who represents them, not private interest groups or big money.

If passed, Bill 16 would guarantee a level playing field by ensuring that associated parties cannot circumvent the statutory spending limit rules to support the same candidates but also increase transparency by enhancing reporting requirements. Our government continues to act on our commitment to ensure that our electoral system is fair, accountable, transparent to all, and these will help to preserve the fairness and integrity of Alberta's democratic electoral system.

So it's with pleasure that I would like to move first reading of Bill 16.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The President of Treasury Board and Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of the C.D. Howe Institute's report entitled *The Numbers Game: Rating the Fiscal Accountability of Canada's Senior Governments, 2018*. This report shows a huge improvement in Alberta's fiscal accountability since our government took over. In its final three years the Conservatives received a B grade and two C grades. I'm proud to say that Alberta received its third consecutive A plus grade for fiscal transparency under this government. I'm very proud that we've improved this rating of transparency and accountability dramatically from the opaque budgeting of the Conservative government, one the Auditor General couldn't even get his head around. Here are five copies.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings, hon. members? It appears not.

I believe, hon. members, we are at Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Election Commissioner Appointment

16. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices tabled on April 10, 2018, Sessional Paper 67/2018, and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Mr. Lorne Gibson be appointed as Election Commissioner for a term of five years commencing May 15, 2018.

[Debate adjourned May 2]

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On a point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order?

Mr. Mason: If I may, yeah. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to briefly correct a misstatement that was made by me when this matter was under debate last week. At that time I indicated that the position of Election Commissioner is already covered under the sunshine list provisions of the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act.* That is not correct. I was misinformed on the matter. Due to an inadvertent omission this position was not added to the list of independent officers covered by that act. That was an oversight which, I should inform the House, we mean to correct through the miscellaneous statutes amendment act, and those changes would be brought forward in this sitting.

I can further advise that no contract has been signed by Mr. Gibson, and there is therefore no contract to disclose. If and when a contract is signed, Mr. Speaker, we are prepared to discuss the matter of early disclosure, not only with Mr. Gibson but also with two other independent officers who, I should note, have been appointed by the House without a similar request being made.

The Speaker: Hon. member, that is a unique kind of point of order. I understood that we would not raise that until the end of the debate; nonetheless, it has been said, and we'll adjust accordingly.

I believe we're on Motion 16. Who wishes to speak to the motion? The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As always, it's a pleasure to rise in the House and to speak to Motion 16. I mean, we've been very clear on this side of the House on our impression of this process. I have to say that I haven't had the privilege of being on a selection committee before this time. I actually really, really enjoyed the process. It was very interesting. There was a tremendous amount of information and great discussion that comes to the table. It's always, really, a huge privilege to be able to be with members and find out their particulars on what they believe to be true about a particular situation. You learn a lot about each other.

Again, I would like to acknowledge the chair and his ability to manage this particular committee as there was a lot of very passionate and robust debate about this particular position. Just to restate for the record, Mr. Speaker, this side of the House, the opposition, made very clear statements towards the lack of necessity for a commissioner to be appointed through debates on Bill 32.

I'd like to also make a couple of other things extremely clear. We felt that there were other people that would have better fit the position. Having said that, no matter who had filled the position, Mr. Speaker, we would have been asking for the exact same amendments, the exact same amount of transparency, and we would have still altogether, no matter who had been chosen, remained with our original stance, that we believed that the commissioner was not necessary from the beginning, being that we were told straight out that the commissioner position was already being handled extremely well, as it was originally, through the officer.

I just want to clarify that because the government has tried to make a point that this is personal or that we are just attacking one particular person. I want to make that very, very clear, that that is not the case and that, again, no matter who had been chosen in this particular situation, we would have very much backed our original decision on this side of the House that the Election Commissioner position was not necessary given the fact that we had been informed in committee that the particulars of this particular situation were being handled very well as they are. Just to be clear with that because of the government wanting to take a personal position on

*See page 702, left column, paragraph 10

this or saying that we are having a personal issue or a personal position with this person: that's not the case.

We've said on many occasions that he's extremely qualified, that there are obvious, you know, reasons that you would choose this person under normal circumstances, but because of historical issues with previous governments and those concerns, which we raised over and over again, and considering, too, that the government actually takes responsibility for the people that are handled here – interestingly enough, in discussions I was asked if I was concerned, if I was concerned about this commissioner being chosen. I found that to be a very interesting question. Why would I need to be concerned about an officer of the Legislature? I don't know, Mr. Speaker. Should I be concerned? This is a question that was asked of me, if I should be nervous or concerned or worried about this particular person. It's an interesting question, isn't it?

I put it to the Legislature that I don't believe that any of us should be concerned. I don't believe that an officer of the Legislature should have any more power than what is designated in their role to do. As I understand it, with this role the commissioner will be investigating situations and, quite frankly, is going to be investigating situations – I mean, I can speak for rural. I've never run in a city riding. In rural ridings many, many, many times we have humungous areas to cover. Quite often it's our families and our husbands, wives, our children – in fact, on my CA I have my husband and my son. Initially, it was my husband, my son, and my sister-in-law, along with three members that were from the original party, that started that CA. Had they not supported me and supported the desire to go forward, we wouldn't have had a constituency association, let alone being able to support me going forward with my election campaign.

I can't begin to tell you how important – and I'm sure everybody here can understand that. We're so, so grateful for the support that we receive on any of our individual campaigns. These moms and dads and husbands and wives and kids that are all involved are the ones that could potentially – they are going to be the ones under investigation. This is a really, really sensitive issue, and based on what we saw with many of the other applicants coming forward, we saw that sensitivity. We understood that. That's at least my interpretation. Of course, you'll have to take my word, Mr. Speaker, and my lived experience on this and my anecdotal experience, which doesn't take away from any of the anecdotes that other members in the Legislature would present because theirs are as valuable as mine. I'm not trying to overstate that. I just want to make clear where my position comes from.

3:00

The Chief Electoral Officer had made it very clear that he was extremely capable and that his office was capable to handle all of the work that was coming his way. Even with that, the government pushed through Bill 32 in order to create this position. It was quite reckless in the aspect that it was forced through the Legislative Assembly Office, and it was a job posting that was “composed.” That is a very interesting word. It's created. It's an evolved position.

An interesting piece of this, I'd like to add, is that never – it's funny because when Lorne Gibson had the Chief Electoral Officer position before and his contract wasn't renegotiated, at no point do I ever recall any talks about the need for a commissioner. We always talked about officers. We always talked about that role. Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, the idea and the objective of commissioner never came up. It's interesting now that that's the role that's being applied for. Interestingly enough, we're here with a composed job for a commissioner. I just find it an interesting intersectionality of information.

The other thing, too, that we've spoken about at length, is that the job posting for this was done over Christmas. Mr. Speaker, in any situation why would a government make a posting over a holiday? I don't understand the logistics of that. I don't understand the logic. I don't understand how there's any relevance to posting it then. There weren't enough people that responded, so then they had to rush back in and do another posting. There were people here that had to come back in to make certain deadlines. They had to come in over the Christmas holidays. That's an amazing staff. Congratulations and kudos to the folks who did that because that's a lot to ask. I know that as MLAs we're all on all the time. It doesn't matter when we're home, whether it's Christmas or Easter. I mean, we're all on all the time, but that's the decision that we've made being elected officials, being public officials.

But to create a brand new position – and Mr. Speaker, the position was created in less than 48 hours – and then decide to open it during Christmas? I just don't understand it. It was more expensive to run it over Christmas. It was \$20,000. We actually advised the government not to do this. There was a huge rush, which we don't understand. I still to this day very much don't understand.

So in respect to that, I would like to make an amendment.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we now have it distributed. An amendment is proposed. We will be identifying it as amendment A2.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, sir. I would like to move that Government Motion 16 be amended by striking out “a term of five years commencing May 15, 2018,” and substituting “a term commencing on May 15, 2018, and expiring 12 months after polling day for the next provincial general election in Alberta.” The reason for this, Mr. Speaker, is that this aligns with the Chief Electoral Officer. He has similar wording in his contract, so it'll align with that. There is absolutely no reason for the commissioner's contract to go beyond what the officer's contract goes to.

Basically, Mr. Gibson is supplementing and, in some ways, quite redundant in his position to the officer. The suggestion would be, Mr. Speaker, that that job and the contract should align with the officer. It makes complete sense. There's absolutely no reason – the whole reason to have these folks here is to help us through the election period. The work has already been done. Mr. Gibson has already been hired, so we would like to make sure that taxpayers get the most for their dollars and that Mr. Gibson is hired for a term that aligns with the electoral officer, which would make for a very efficient use of his time. I'm quite certain, based on Mr. Gibson's history and who he is and his obvious ability to do his job, that one year will be more than enough time to give him what he needs in order to finish up any concerns or outstanding issues that he may have had during the election.

As I've stated previously, there's been some interesting conduct with regard to this particular situation. This process was so rushed. The process was definitely one-sided. The process could have led to a mutual decision about a person. It would have been very, very easy to have a vote that was more consistent with the feel of all of the people that were part of the committee. We had an opportunity also to look at – we want to make sure, Mr. Speaker, especially because this is a new position and we're not quite sure how the position will work out. I think it's better to err on the side of efficiency so that Mr. Gibson, when he comes in to set up his office, is given a very clear set of rules on the way his job will go so that he is able to make the most use of his time while he's here to benefit Albertans. It is their taxpayer dollars that go toward paying for this position. Because it's a brand new position, I think that we owe it to ourselves to see how that position goes.

If Mr. Gibson is hired back to do the job afterwards, his contract can be renewed at any time after that 12 months or during that period, I'm certain, with the committee getting together again to renew his contract. I'm sure the government is quite certain that this is the person for the job. I'm sure he'll do an excellent job. I'm not quite sure why we have to extend it to the maximum, Mr. Speaker. I think it would be better if we bring that down, get his work done, and then we have an adequate amount of work to be able to look at to see how that contract should be renewed. Should the contract need to be extended for any particular reason, it would be worth while to look at renewing his contract should that need to happen.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, it would align with the election, which makes the most sense. If the election would be in 2019, he would stay for 12 months after that election to finish up any particular work that he would need to do at that time. Based on Mr. Gibson and his very, very excellent resume I'm absolutely sure that he would have no problem getting this done. He seems, based on his resume, extremely efficient. He gets his jobs done on time. And I think that, with anything, efficiency happens when we give structure.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View?

Seeing and hearing none, we're dealing with amendment A2. The Member for Calgary-Currie on the amendment, correct?

Mr. Malkinson: That is correct, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Malkinson: Mr. Speaker, amendment A2 is seeking to shorten the term of Mr. Gibson's appointment to 12 months after the next election. That would mean there would be a term of basically two years, you know, assuming the election happens according to the time of the next expected election.

Now, how I would interpret this, having watched this whole process, Mr. Speaker, from the beginning – I just got a note from the Clerk that we started debating this motion on May 1. We are currently at May 8. This is a clear attempt, I think, for the opposition to fire Mr. Gibson even before he has a chance to meaningfully get the office set up and started. It is a clear attempt to frustrate this process.

3:10

I'm going to leave that aside for a moment and talk a little bit more about the amendment itself. Twelve months after the next polling day, Mr. Speaker. Now, elections tend to be when perhaps electoral issues, whether it be perhaps bad behaviour by a third party or by political parties, tend to come to bear, during an election. I'm not casting shade on any third party or any particular political party, but historically that's when elections tend to generate the most complaints, that Mr. Gibson would potentially be investigating. To say, "Oh, you're going to have to go up for review in 12 months," when the government of the day might be under investigation at that time, perhaps seems like a bad idea and goes against the spirit of Mr. Gibson's position.

I think this amendment is an extremely bad idea. I ask the members from the opposition why they continue to frustrate the process, Mr. Speaker. We have already seen multiple news articles that say this idea that, you know, perhaps there were some problems with how he was not appointed the previous time. I think I would be happy to talk to the members previous on that.

But I think I'm going to leave with one question for the opposition on this amendment: when will you stop frustrating the

process, when will you stop filibustering the process, and when will you pass this motion so that Mr. Gibson can start the good work to protect our democracy?

I will be voting against this, and I encourage everyone in this House to stop this ridiculous filibuster and get his appointment approved.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View. Is it on 29(2)(a)?

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oh, there were lots of words: filibuster, frustrated, fired. I'm going to deal with all of those. First of all, nobody on this side has said anything about firing Mr. Gibson. Absolutely not. I love the assumption that we're going to be in government, though, so thank you so much. I love even more the assumption that we would fire Mr. Gibson because we might be in trouble. What did I just say to you? There are accusations that I should be concerned about? What should I be concerned about? Can somebody in here tell me what I need to be worried about? I will go over all of my – I don't know. If you have some concerns for me, I would love to know about them. Please list them and send them my way. If I can avoid a run-in with the commissioner, I'd prefer that.

Secondly, the reason, Mr. Speaker, that we have democracy and filibustering is for robust debate, and I think the only thing that's frustrated is the member, to be quite honest. I don't think we're frustrated over here debating this. I'm sorry that you're frustrated. That's not something I can help you out with.

However, we will continue to do what we were hired to come here and do, which is to filibuster this issue until we understand and make sure we've made every single point on this side about our concerns. To be clear, when the Election Commissioner is hired, if for some reason there's a concern about his work or anything like that, guess what? We have an officer who is actually completely competent and very able to continue on with any concerns.

I find it interesting. The member across obviously likes Mr. Lorne Gibson very, very much and has said on many occasions that he's completely capable, and now he's basically saying that Mr. Gibson is not capable to finish his job 12 months after the election cycle. Honestly, if there are concerns or if a government, for example, is under question about particular situations and they can't figure that out within a year, we have trouble, Houston. We need to figure that out sooner.

Mr. Speaker, to be clear, we will filibuster on this side until we feel that the debate has been handled appropriately and we have done our job on behalf of the taxpayers that have put us here.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much. I find it interesting that, you know, all of a sudden the members opposite have a sudden enthusiasm for the democratic process when over and over again they walk out on the vote on Bill 9, an important issue for women in this province. If anyone is not doing their job, I would suggest it's the hon. members.

But I will get back to some of the comments that were in here before. What I said, Mr. Speaker, was that to have the term expire 12 months after an election means that there would potentially be investigations that would be in progress. I think, to anyone who's listening to this debate right now, one could logically see why that might potentially be a conflict of interest, to have the government

of the day have to perhaps have a different Election Commissioner because the one that they would have currently might be investigating them, and the government of the day might not like that. One of the reasons why Mr. Gibson is an incredible candidate for this position is that he has a long, proud history of speaking truth to power. That is why this amendment is an amazingly not good idea.

I ask again the hon. members why they keep filibustering what should be a simple appointment. To say it's because they've suddenly found righteousness for doing their jobs – perhaps I look forward to, you know, introducing them back to the House when we have a vote on Bill 9. Hopefully, they will stand up for their constituents then.

Now, they're going to go on and say: oh, the position is perhaps redundant. They're fair to say that, but that bill has already passed, and I think the ship to debate on that has passed, Mr. Speaker.

I know that they're going to talk about how there were other experienced candidates, and I would say to that, in fact, that he is the most experienced candidate. That is why the majority of the members on that committee voted for him to be the candidate, Mr. Speaker.

Some say that there's a cloud around him. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy in a future 29(2)(a) to go on a very loud history lesson on how the previous PC government was making partisan appointments. I think we could all see why that would be a problem if we're going to have fair and open elections, that we have the government of the day appointing returning officers who are partisan. I mean, of course, members of the UCP: although a new name, a good majority of them are from members of the previous PC Party.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members who would like to speak to amendment A2? The Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for allowing me to speak on this very important Government Motion 16. You know, the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View's amendment: I think it's very simple, changing the term to 12 months after the next election.

As the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View already said in her comments, the government side fought tooth and nail to have this person selected. Like, you should have been there. I think the committee was more furious and feisty than the movie *300*, Mr. Speaker. I'm not even making this up. This was, like, predetermined: this is the person we want, he's our candidate, and we're doing whatever we can to get this person in. That was the intent of that search committee. I had the honour to be in the search committees for the Auditor General and Ombudsman, and in those two search committees the members from all parties worked for a common goal in a nonpartisan way to have this person selected so that the person can do their job to serve Albertans, but this was clearly not the case here.

They're talking about, like, how amazing this person is, and we don't deny that. Of course, this person brings a lot of experience, Mr. Speaker, but I said that. I quoted that in the committee. He also brings a lot of stigma, a lot of baggage. When the government is trying to create this new office, we need a fresh start. We need a noncontroversial person. Why we have to have this person as soon as this person gets selected – and I have nothing against that person, Mr. Gibson, and I think he has, you know, served the public, and that's great.

3:20

For the government member to ask our Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, "You guys must be concerned," I find it, like, very offensive, actually. Why would we be concerned? We're not concerned with Mr. Gibson. We are however concerned with the intention of this government. The Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Glen Resler, on the public record – and, Mr. Speaker, I think I'm saying this for probably the 10th time – said that his office is totally capable of handling all the inquiries, all the problems, all the issues, so there's no need to create a new office.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, this government wants to believe that they're fighting for Albertans and their families. This office is going to cost \$1.5 million plus the office expenses and whatnot. On top of that, they will not disclose his salary. This doesn't even pass the smell test. [interjections] It's easier to heckle. You can heckle after 2019 all you want because that's all you'll be doing.

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Gill: It hurts. The truth hurts, Mr. Speaker. We don't heckle, so let me talk.

Funny thing. I was having a conversation on a side note yesterday with the Government House Leader, and you know what I said? I said: it must be really hard for you to do your job because your members will not listen to you. Yesterday. You can probably talk to him.

We have a job to do, Mr. Speaker, to defend people. Did you see that? They think this is a joke. Over 4 million people are depending on the decisions that are made in this House, and they think it is a joke.

An Hon. Member: Do you see me laughing?

The Speaker: Hon. member.
Please proceed.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that I'll try to speak to the amendment.

You know, as I said, the temperature was very high in the search committee, and it was told by all members that this person is like a godsend. If he is that good a person, I think he should be able to do his job. He should be able to handle all the complaints 12 months after the election. Don't you think that's a reasonable amendment? I think it's a reasonable amendment.

Now the government is not willing to disclose his salary. That was the whole idea of this bill and this office, to be more transparent, take the black money out of politics, so let's do that. Let's take the black money. Let's be transparent. Let's tell the people who are paying our salaries. Let's tell Albertans, who are paying this office and the whole set-up. You guys can heckle all you want after the next election, I'm telling you, but this is the serious thing. Let's tell them that their money is going towards this office. Why do we need to hide it from Albertans? I don't understand.

I think we should support this amendment, and if there's any issue, let's try to talk about the issue, how we can make this bill stronger and this office more transparent. I think that's the real job we have at hand, not to do a personal attack and heckle and, you know, all those things. We're here, and we have a duty to perform. Let's do our duty to the best of our abilities, and let's see how we can work together and how we can make this land a better land. How can we serve our people in a better way?

We have a bill which has passed. That's okay. Let's work together to make this office a better office so that the officer, Mr.

Gibson, can perform his duties without any interruption, without any political parties, no matter who is in the government. I don't think there are any objections to that. There shouldn't be any objections to that. Why are we not doing this? I don't know.

I mean, like, from the beginning of this search committee, when the advertisement was done during Christmastime, the government members were warned, Mr. Speaker, that it's only 48 hours and that this advertisement in the local media, wherever this advertisement was going to go, was not going to attract enough coverage. I don't know. Some people are saying that they just wanted this person, so they already knew, it's safe to assume. I don't know that that's why they advertised during the holidays, so that nobody else would find this ad. I don't know. But we're past that point.

Since we've passed the point, I think we can make this a stronger bill. We can make this office a stronger office, be more transparent, what this government intends to say every time. They claim that. So why are we hiding from Albertans? If this person is that great that he's so capable, he should be able to perform his duties unless the government has a crystal ball and they see that, like, there are going to be so many complaints in the next provincial election that this person will not be able to handle that. I don't know.

Look at this, Mr. Speaker. Where is the Government House Leader? I feel bad for the Government House Leader. Honestly, I do.

Anyways, I ask members from both sides, I think: if they believe in transparency and if they believe in serving the public, which they always claim every time they open their mouths, especially when they're not heckling, let's support this amendment. Let's make this office a transparent office and give Mr. Gibson all the tools that he needs to get his job done, to do his duties. However, when we don't need him, we don't need to keep him in his office.

Anyways, I'll ask every member to support this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, just to remind you – I didn't want to interject – we do not refer to whether there's any member in or out of the House. For the future I would remind you of that.

Mr. Gill: Appreciate it.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Barnes: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank my hon. colleague for standing up and talking so passionately about a procedure that could have been straightforward, that has obviously gone so sideways, with money being wasted, things not being full and transparent to the taxpayer. What I'd like to ask the hon. member – I know, from his past life and experience in business, that two things here seem really, really odd to me, that the officer's contract, a full five years, goes past the Chief Electoral Officer's contract, who he'll be working closely with. He's obviously stated that he felt his department could have done the job. So how does it seem appropriate and practical that the new five-year contract goes much longer than the existing commissioner's contract?

Secondly, we saw and heard how the government just threw away \$20,000, totally being unwilling to listen to the Official Opposition members on the committee that spoke clearly: let's get as much value for taxpayer dollars as we can; let's make our time and our staff's time as productive as possible.

Now here we are with a five-year term. It appears to have no probationary period, no out clause for the employer. It seems to me to be a bad protection for the taxpayer, you know, those people that stand in northern Alberta on December 15 and January 15 and loyally and faithfully pay their taxes to help fellow Albertans. In your experience, is it standard business practice to give a five-year

contract with no means of review or changing it or escape if necessary? Is this something that is a standard business practice?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. You know what? It's actually a very good point, and we did bring this concern in our search committee meeting. The bill allows for this office for a term of five years. However, I mean, in any business model – like, in my previous life you would never ever have something like this, as concrete as this, without any probation, without any respect, for the lack of better words, for the taxpayers, who are sending us here. I think it throws all those things out of the window, five years without any clause.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, you probably remember this. I know my PC colleagues are probably going to hate me for this. Do you remember when we had the previous government, and Alberta Health Services – remember the cookie guy? You remember, right? And he was eating. It was, like, Alberta Health Services or – I don't remember. They changed so many times. They centralized, then decentralized. He was eating a cookie, and the media asked him a question, and he said, "Can't you see I'm eating a cookie?" or something like that. It was, like, back in the day. That is disrespectful towards the taxpayers.

My statement is going to be played, I guarantee you, when this person is going to be – people are going to say that this was a waste of the taxpayer's dollar. Sir, I say that with all humility, because we could have done such a better job. It is not a laughing matter. That's respect for the people who wake up, who do night shift, who pay our taxes. It is their money, sir. This is not a laughing matter. It is a laughing matter to you.

Mr. Westhead: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted. What's the point of order, Banff-Cochrane?

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, under 23(h), (i), and (j) the member opposite is ascribing motives to members on this side that are just simply false. It's become a pattern of this particular member. I think he ought to portray the actions in this Legislature accurately. He's not doing so, and I would ask you to ask him to stop.

The Speaker: The party whip for the Official Opposition.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened carefully, and the hon. member that spoke on the government side didn't say what motives the Member for Calgary-Greenway was ascribing, so I don't know how there's possibly a point of order. There's probably a disagreement. For my part, I would, with your permission, advise my colleague to address his remarks through the chair.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I think the point of order being raised: you might be getting awfully close to that, hon. member. But I reminded you a few minutes ago to speak through the chair. You engaged in finger pointing and dialogue with the other side of the House. You then again did it. So please (a) be conscious of the comments that you're making, and (b) speak through the chair.

I think you have a few minutes left.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will definitely speak through you, sir.

Debate Continued

Mr. Gill: Going back to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, you know, the crux here, Mr. Speaker, is the respect for the taxpayer dollar. Like, will any businessperson make this kind of a deal? That was his question. No. This is a bad deal for taxpayers to have. That's the real issue here.

The Speaker: We are on amendment A2. Are there any other members? The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege. You called it amendment A2 to Government Motion 16, as introduced by my colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View. I will be speaking in favour of this amendment. I do believe it's an amendment that's worthy of consideration. Essentially, the amendment reads: to strike out the portion in the motion that reads "a term of five years commencing May 15, 2018" and substitute "a term commencing on May 15, 2018, and expiring 12 months after polling day for the next provincial general election."

You know, Mr. Speaker, I was fortunate enough to be part of the search committee for Election Commissioner as well as for Ombudsman and Auditor General, and I believe that the work we do on search committees is on behalf of all Albertans in the best interests of all Albertans. In that regard, the member opposite from Calgary that spoke just a little earlier with regard to his concerns that possibly the opposition is frustrating the process – you know, we have not even had all of our members have the ability to speak to the motion, and already the members opposite are considering that we are frustrating the process. I would disagree, and I would suggest that the process is an important process to allow Albertans to be the judge, to allow Albertans to see what is going on, and to get the information. Let Albertans be the judge.

I believe that the search committee, the search that the Leg. Offices Committee began and went through, was a rushed process, much like the member opposite is now trying to rush the deliberations on Government Motion 16. I believe it was done in a fairly reckless manner, and we've heard many of the other members here talk about that and how things were rushed against certain recommendations to the committee with regard to advertising during the holiday season, with regard to building a job description in a very short period of time. I have concerns with that.

But speaking to the amendment, we're looking at working on a term that would be in conjunction with an election period. To end the term of the Election Commissioner a year after the general election would allow the Election Commissioner to do the investigations and all of the work that needs to get done and then to have the term end the same as it is for the Chief Electoral Officer and to be considered for reappointment. I do not believe that this amendment is offside in any way. I believe it would give the Election Commissioner ample time to do the investigations necessary and to file reports. Let's face it, Mr. Speaker. The Election Commissioner's work in years 2 and 3 after an election is probably very minimal, so we can take a look at this and see that to end it a year after appointment or after the next general election is very reasonable.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

When the member from Calgary spoke with regard to the opposition frustrating the process – the process started on May 1, the motion was introduced on May 1, and now here we are on May

8. Well, I would suggest that we have not been deliberating for a whole week on this motion. We have had very limited time dedicated to Government Motion 16.

I do believe that Albertans expect us to ensure that we do a thorough review of the work that's being done. It is our role as Official Opposition to ensure that Albertans are fully informed, and I have concerns when members from the governing party are complaining that we're frustrating the process when the process is in place to protect the people – that's the people of Alberta – and that's to allow the people of Alberta to be the judge. If the people of Alberta will judge that we're frustrating the process, so be it. That's on us. If the people of Alberta will judge that the government is operating in a manner that is irresponsible, does not necessarily match with what would be considered good business practice, good planning, then I think that's on them.

This appointment by this committee was not a unanimous choice – that's very clear – so we can expect to have further discussion when we get into this House to discuss this appointment. I believe that that's what Albertans would expect of the Official Opposition.

3:40

We need to consider what a five-year term would entail. A five-year term, if started on May 15, 2018, with an election expected in May 2019 and then, four years after that, an election in May 2023, I suppose: in the election of May 2023 the Election Commissioner is right at the end of the five-year term. It seems completely unreasonable to me. It does not seem reasonable to have a term end for your Election Commissioner right in the middle of what would be the very busiest time of that commissioner's job description, their duties. It could land up pretty much right at the same time as the next election after the 2019 election, the election of 2023.

You know, elections can be called early. I understand that. But the reason that we discuss at committee and we discuss here with regard to ending the term a year after the general election is to highlight the fact that there was a good reason that governments in the past had decided to end a term of the Chief Electoral Officer a year after a general election. Why would they make that decision? Because, I believe, it makes good practice. If you end a year after, it gives you time then to do another search. If the individual would retire or if the individual was not reappointed, it gives you time to do the search necessary to fill that position again before the next election.

I believe that's an important process, that Albertans will understand that, yes, a five-year term really doesn't make sense with regard to this position. A five-year term and having the commissioner's reappointment needing to happen right in the middle of an election process, pretty much right when the next election would need to be scheduled, do not make sense, and everyday Albertans understand that. I'm not sure why members of the governing party do not understand that. They continue to move along and move along in a manner that for some reason seems to work in the favour of this individual.

Five years was the maximum term that was allotted or allowed under the legislation. The committee was – essentially, in the advertisement we put out the range of salary that would be allotted to this individual and also that it would be up to a maximum of a five-year term. I don't understand why the government, members from the governing party, would make a decision to go to a full five-year term, the maximum term allowed under the legislation, for an individual that's just beginning in the first-year process. I could maybe understand, if they had been in their office for two years or three years and everybody was very happy with the performance of this individual, possibly looking at a five-year term.

But to look at a five-year term before any work has even been started or accomplished or the like concerns me, especially since the five-year term with this position, Election Commissioner, lands us up right in the middle of what would be considered probably the next election after the 2019 election. I do not believe that that's in the best interests of Albertans.

I am here to work on behalf of Albertans and to provide common-sense solutions to the ideas that the government is putting forward and, at the same time, hope that the members from the governing party see the sense in those common-sense solutions. I believe that this amendment, amendment A2, to end the term a year after the next general election aligns with what we would expect for the Chief Electoral Officer and makes perfectly good sense. To end it 12 months after the next provincial election allows us to recognize that the work that's necessary to get completed, the investigations that are necessary to get completed on the previous election could get done. The reappointment could happen or not. The individual could retire. That would give this Assembly the opportunity to take the time necessary to find a replacement before the next election cycle starts.

I do not want to be in a situation, in a position where we are almost forced to reappoint an Election Commissioner right in the middle of an election cycle. I do not believe it's in the best interests of Albertans to be in a position where we have to make a decision one way or the other during that period of time, so I think this is a very reasonable amendment. I think we can all agree that the work that the Election Commissioner will have can be wrapped up in a year's time and that there would be a very limited number of complaints that would be coming forward in year 2, year 3, after an election. Therefore, there would be very limited work there. We would not have to rush the process and all of a sudden be forced to go: okay; now we need an Election Commissioner. If we are caught in a position where the individual retires, is not reappointed, we're rushed into the process of finding another individual, and that does concern me. It concerns me how this has been rushed at this time, and that gives me concern about the process that we will be faced with in 2023, at the end of the five-year term.

Madam Speaker, I do not believe that we should move forward with a five-year term. I believe this is a perfectly reasonable amendment. I believe Albertans would judge it the same, that this is a perfectly reasonable amendment, and at the end of the day I would like to do what Albertans would see as the most reasonable. I do not believe that Albertans would see it being reasonable to have this position end right in the middle of an election cycle. We are likely into another election by May 2023, and here we are: we have no Election Commissioner. To me, that's poor management. To me, that's poor decision-making. To me, that hangs on this government's decision at this time to move in that direction.

I believe it's a very reckless decision. I believe it's a decision that's not in the best interests of Albertans, so I need to try and understand: who is it that gets the best interests from this decision for a five-year term? The only person that I can see that gains from this – let's say that there are possibly two groups. Maybe the government gains from this. I do not know. But, at the end of the day, with the five-year term being the maximum term that was allowed in the legislation, it seems to favour the candidate, seems to favour the individual that's been appointed to this position. Is that fair or not? I can't judge that at this time – I would leave that judgment till after the work is performed – but at the end of the day I believe that Albertans would recognize that to have a five-year term and to put a decision on an Election Commissioner at a point in time where we have the next general election likely to happen is concerning.

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

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. He does raise some interesting questions and, actually, doubt. He had me thinking that it is peculiar. It is peculiar that you have a five-year term that, you know, would start on May 15, 2018, and potentially end in May 2023, which would be smack dab in the middle of an election unless the government has no intention of calling an election in May 2019. Then that raises a doubt as to the possibility that this government has no intention of calling an election in May 2019, and therefore that would change the possibilities and the timelines as set forth.

3:50

I mean, surely, this government cannot be that naive, that in 2023 you would have a role, that the Member for Calgary-Currie said is such an important role – and I have already questioned in this House the duplication and the words from Glen Resler, the Chief Electoral Officer, who indicated that this is a role that he questions and that he and his office already can do. So I raise this to the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. Is there certainly a possibility that the government has no intention of calling an election in May 2019 and therefore would skew the timelines, as indicated by the hiring of this individual?

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleague from Calgary-West for recognizing the peculiarity of having the five-year term ending in 2023. With regard to the government not calling an election in 2019, I would suggest that it would be a fatal mistake by the government to move in that direction. I believe that would be something that would definitely upset Albertans, much like the early call of 2015, I believe, upset Albertans. It was politicians that were moving, not necessarily in the best interests of Albertans, and thinking that they knew best, but Albertans decided that, no, it was not in the best interests of Albertans. I would suggest that if that's what the government is considering and that's what allows the five-year term to make some sense, that's one thing.

Also, with regard to the Chief Electoral Officer and the comments that the Chief Electoral Officer has made in the past with regard to doing these investigations and being able to handle them within his office, you know, there may be duplication here, absolutely. I believe there probably is. The position of Election Commissioner: it is possibly not necessary for it to be an office outside of the Chief Electoral Officer. But I don't believe that that's necessarily what we're needing to discuss here. It is what it is. We have the legislation before us. The term falls within the legislation. But I believe that it is somewhat reckless.

What I like about this amendment is that it allows us to recognize that if the government decides to call an election later, it still would allow that position to end a year after the next general election. So if the government decided to delay the election possibly one more year – I'm thinking that that's a possibility – if they decide to have the next general election in 2020, then I guess the term for this commissioner would end in 2021, so it would be a three-year term.

That's the beauty of the amendment that's before us. It recognizes that general elections come and go. They're not necessarily, in Alberta under the current legislation, going to land at a very prescribed time. The amendment allows us to recognize that, and we can have the term end 12 months after, recognizing

that the commissioner needs to finish his work, needs to do what needs to get done, to do the investigations and get it done.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak on Government Motion 16 and on the amendment that the term would commence May 15 and expire 12 months after polling day for the next provincial general election in Alberta.

Well, Madam Speaker, here's an interesting thing. I'm probably not the only one in this House that's looking forward to the next election. There could be members, as far as I know, on all sides looking forward to the next election. But here's where it's relevant to the discussion today, if you don't mind. I have a countdown clock in my phone, and according to that, there are 384 days, four hours, four minutes, and 19 seconds till the close of the polls in the next election.

The reason that's relevant to this discussion is because the time and date that I chose for that was the last Monday in May next year. We've heard the Premier – and I believe the Premier – say here in the House several times before that she intends to honour the law about when the election should be called. I believe the Premier when she says that. Now, elections don't have to be called on a Monday – I understand that – but they usually are. That, indeed, is the last Monday within the legislative time frame. I don't think the time that I've said – well, only the Premier gets to call the election, nobody else, and that's also how it should be.

Again, getting back to the point, the Premier has made it clear that she intends to follow the election law and has, rightly so – I don't blame her – taunted us a couple of times, saying, “You see what happens when you don't follow the election bylaw?” as the previous government didn't. If I was the Premier, I think I might taunt the previous government and those people attached to it about that very same thing, so I would say good on the Premier for so taunting when she has done so.

This does actually connect very directly to the discussion that we're having here, Madam Speaker. It's relevant. Four years after that, again according to the legislation that's in place right now for the time frame to call an election, would be March, April, or May – wait for it – in 2023. At this point, which is really what makes this amendment completely reasonable and sensible, you would actually be looking at finishing the terms of an important part of the electoral preparation team essentially right after, right before, or right in the middle of the next election cycle.

Now, I'm not a cowboy, and I admire those that are. One of the sayings that I've heard cowboys say is that you don't change horses in the middle of a stream. It would be potentially changing horses in the middle of a stream to swap out an important part of the electoral team right before, right after, or right in the middle of a general election. That is not in Albertans' best interests. I don't care what party you're with; there's nothing partisan about what I just said. I think all the folks watching at home, all six of them, might say: yeah, that makes sense. I wouldn't be surprised if members on all sides of this House were thinking: yeah, wait a minute; that actually makes sense, too. That is indeed swapping horses in the middle of a stream. Not a good idea.

Again, if we're to take the Premier's word, which I do – I'm not doubting it; I believe in her a hundred per cent on this – when the Premier says that she'll call the election within the time frame provided for in the legislation, then that makes it incredibly reasonable to support this amendment.

Further, as has been pointed out by several of my colleagues, the date picked here, if I heard them correctly, would co-ordinate with

the time that the current Chief Electoral Officer's contract is up, and if they're going to work together as a team, then why wouldn't you have some co-ordination between their contracts? I would say that with the contract with the current Chief Electoral Officer ending 12 months after the election, it is a completely reasonable time. There's always some accounting to do, some cleanup, some filing of paperwork, some chasing down of successful and unsuccessful electoral candidates to make sure they file their paperwork and get it in and all that kind of stuff and even chasing the ones down that don't get it in on time to get them to do that. With the current time, it gives those people in charge a full year to mop up all the paperwork – all the details, all the after-the-election reporting – after another election, a whole year.

4:00

Let's be clear. I think most Albertans would say – and whether they do or not, I do – that one would hope that the vast majority of if not all that paperwork would be mopped up in three or six months. But, making allowances for unexpected circumstances, making allowances for human frailty, making an allowance just for people leaving things to the last minute, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, a year seems completely reasonable. That's what this amendment says: let's do something completely reasonable in line with what we've done up till now. Something completely reasonable.

Again, you know, leaving aside just for a second that the current Chief Electoral Officer thinks this position is not needed, not my interpretation of his words but his words on the record – we'll get back to that later – nonetheless, if the government is to go ahead and spend whatever amount of money they're going to spend on a position that's not required according to the Chief Electoral Officer, why would you add an additional complication by having the contract ended right before, right after, or right in the middle of a general election? It's silly. That's a polite word, “silly.” I think that's parliamentary. I wasn't trying to be provocative with what I'm saying, but from a common-sense standpoint it seems silly, Madam Speaker.

At some point perhaps we'll hear people from the government side talk about how it's a good idea to have a contract end right before, right after, or right in the middle of a general election. I would be highly entertained and interested to hear whatever logic springs forth to support that position. I will eagerly anticipate that. But between now and then I think it's important that we just try to do what common sense dictates, and common sense dictates that we don't change horses in the middle of a stream. That's what this amendment says. That's why I'm going to support it, and that's why I would politely suggest that all other members of the House support it, too, because we seldom get something that comes along that makes such complete sense in such a nonpartisan way as this amendment that's before us right now.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It sounds like we can look forward to a number of amendments on this particular matter before the House. I have a couple of questions about that, this one in particular.

Madam Speaker, it's helpful to remember how we got here. There were a number of questions around transparency with respect to elections as matters unfolded for 44 years, and there remain a number of questions. The reason for that is that there's an awful lot of dark money sloshing around Alberta politics still in the form of political action committees, which is why we had to take action on those matters, and there's still a studied attempt to obfuscate

coming from Conservatives, because clearly they haven't learned anything. The leader of their party still refuses to disclose his donors to his leadership. One wonders if it is because he is ashamed of some of the foreign interests or other groups that do not share mainstream Alberta's values that have perhaps donated to his leadership.

In any event, we are now in the situation where we have hired someone to undertake some of the work that was long overdue in Alberta's election process and, in fact, undertake some of the work that Mr. Gibson, prior to Conservatives' firing him the first time, is now legally mandated to do. It doesn't at all surprise me, Madam Speaker, that now we have Conservatives proposing an amendment to fire Mr. Gibson a second time. What we now have is Conservatives who don't want to have a public conversation about who funds their leadership campaigns, who are running from any mention of the dark money sloshing around their party in the form of political action committees as they not only potentially import foreign money to manage their affairs but also import tactics from the United States with respect to these political action committees. Now we have a proposal to fire Mr. Gibson earlier, like they did the first time, as I said, for doing his job, which is exactly why Conservatives fired Mr. Gibson in the first place. The first time was for doing his job. Quite frankly, that's why Mr. Gibson was the first choice of the majority of the all-party committee, because he did his job. That is why Conservatives don't want him in the chair again.

Madam Speaker, I guess my question is: how many more of these amendments are we going to have? How many more proposals to fire Mr. Gibson is this Legislature going to have to entertain from Conservatives because apparently firing him once, the first time, wasn't enough?

Second, could Conservatives then go on the record and commit to a position where they would, if given the chance, fire Mr. Gibson prior to his term being finished? I'd like to hear them go on the record and commit to firing Mr. Gibson a second time for doing his job because once wasn't enough when he stood up for transparency and accountability and the integrity of the democratic system, when he stood up to Conservatives the first time.

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Hays, do you wish to respond?

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. The hon. minister would do well to take lessons from her Premier, who did the taunting about calling the election early and didn't go off on a bunch of sidetracks that are completely inaccurate, starting with the fact that my understanding of the gentleman's contract was that he finished it the first time around and, as best I could tell, got paid for every day he worked. Where I come from, I don't call that getting fired. It's just the way it is.

Anyways, the fact is, Madam Speaker, they intend to give this person, who is newer than the current Chief Electoral Officer and who the Chief Electoral Officer says isn't needed, a longer tenure than the current Chief Electoral Officer, who is doing a very good job. They intend to have this person's term come to an end in the middle of a general election for the people of Alberta. I can't think of anything less responsible than the timing the government has chosen. I know they're a little embarrassed about being corrected on that.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. Well, I was an original part of the committee that was disbanded at some point in

relation to electoral reform, but I did have some conversations even after I left the committee. Only in most recent days, after the considerations of this new commissioner, did I speak with others across the country about the role of this new officer. Indeed, I've spoken to at least one Chief Electoral Officer in the country who found it surprising that it was necessary to hire a totally separate Chief Electoral Officer and that he was full-time because the indications that this experienced Chief Electoral Officer had around these issues were that it certainly wouldn't be a full-time position. It raised the question about: why not start small and see what is necessary, consider a part-time position, if at all?

Given the comments that we've heard from our own Chief Electoral Officer, it does raise serious questions about an extra expense and potentially a political motivation around hiring a man who has obviously had challenges with the process at some level. I don't know all the details of his lawsuit, but it was certainly a concern for me at the time that he appeared to be scapegoated by the previous administration. That was of some concern to me, the reasons. I felt that that election had serious problems with it and that as much responsibility lay with the previous government as it did with the Chief Electoral Officer, so I wasn't surprised when the lawsuit happened.

4:10

But to the point of this amendment, it strikes me as eminently reasonable to consider a year and see what the importance of this position is, see how relevant it is, see how essential it is to spend quite a lot of money. You're talking over a couple of million dollars to house him in the office and all his ancillary expenses. At the very least, he should be hired on a part-time basis, and he should be given a shorter term limit, in my view, to see the extent to which the work demands this extra support system.

Again, our own Chief Electoral Officer has said that he could probably handle that within the expanded role that he has and the expanded staff he has under the new elections financing act that was passed here. I'm a little bit surprised at the resistance across the way in looking at this position in such a long-term way when there are serious questions about the need for a full-time person and signing a five-year contract. We're talking about millions of dollars that could be spent elsewhere.

I will be supporting this amendment for the reasons I've given, including an authority across the country who says that he's surprised at why you would be hiring a second Chief Electoral Officer in a full-time position for a five-year period. He just gave me those very frank comments without knowing any of the background of this, so I think the government should take a second look at this and see about the public interest, about the fiscal responsibility issue, and indeed about a position that hasn't really proven itself necessary.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was very interested in the member's comments, particularly when he talks about hiring a second Chief Electoral Officer. To the member, you know, I wonder how he would feel if, for example, the people of Calgary-Mountain View selected a second MLA while the hon. member was still doing his job. I wonder if the member could comment about if the government appointed a second environment minister while the first environment minister is sitting there and what kind of a message that would send to the current environment minister. I

would think that that would be a very negative message and one that would not give the person with the current role, whatever that role happened to be, a lot of confidence that their employer had confidence in them.

To me, hiring a second Chief Electoral Officer when you've already got a Chief Electoral Officer seems very disrespectful. Certainly, in our party there's a deputy whip, you know, but if they selected to put a second whip in place, I would start to wonder whether they thought I was doing a bad job. Now, they might think that. They might think something else. But, honestly, I'd have to say that that's a thought that would come to my mind right away. To the member, I just wonder about how respectful it is to the current Chief Electoral Officer to essentially hire somebody to do the same job that he's already doing when he's taken the time out of his life to go to a committee and say that we don't need this position and that it's duplicating what he's already doing. If your job is to count buttons at the button factory and you get all the buttons counted every day and they hire a second button counter, the first button counter might think: "Wow. Maybe they don't think that I'm doing a good job of counting the buttons. Maybe I'm on borrowed time. Maybe they're going to get rid of me."

To the hon. member, I hope you'll talk about this. I'm going to give him some time to stand up and talk about it. In this light, when elections are so crucial and democracy is so crucial, to actually rock the confidence of your Chief Electoral Officer by hiring someone to shadow that person when he's already said that that's not needed: clearly, it just seems like a recipe, potentially, for anarchy. I just wonder what the hon. member would think about that. I'd like to give him an opportunity to comment on hiring a second person. Particularly, on top of all of that, when the government is already running \$8 billion and \$9 billion a year in deficits, why would they hire a second person to do a job that's already being fully done?

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you for the question. Indeed, I am concerned at what the morale in that office would potentially be by disregarding the advice of our own Chief Electoral Officer and hiring somebody that may or may not fit into the culture of the current Chief Electoral Officer. But more to the point, when we're still exploring the need for this, why not give it a shorter term and at least assess the extent to which a full-time, separate office is needed here in the interests of fiscal responsibility as well as the issue that's been raised? How do we divide up the work in that office if we have two chiefs, and what will some of the implications be for his staff and the other commissioner's staff? It does raise serious questions about how quickly we're moving to that commitment, a five-year commitment, and some of the challenges associated with that.

I don't think it's too late to pull back a little bit and then to review the contract at least. It may be that we're committed to a contract, but I would hope that we would review things at the end of a year and decide: first of all, is it needed; secondly, is it full-time; and thirdly, what kind of a job is this delivering? So I would hope the government would think about it again.

It's not something that I have a particularly vested interest in. I'm speaking on behalf of Albertans, who want to see a responsible electoral process, who want to see some reform. I applaud the government for bringing in the financial limits, some of the important, important work that was not done by the previous government.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Motion 16, the appointment of Lorne Gibson as Election Commissioner, and specifically to amendment A2, put forward by my colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View, that talks about the fact that the proposal is for a term of five years commencing May 15. The amendment is seeking to reduce that to "expiring 12 months after polling day for the next provincial general election in Alberta." I think that the Chief Electoral Officer's contract reads in somewhat that same kind of language, so this would align, certainly, with that.

Now, there has been a minority report put forward by four members of the committee, which has been made public, so I will refer to that from time to time as I continue. I can certainly table the document if required, but I am sure that that has already been done.

On April 5 the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices passed a motion recommending that Mr. Lorne Gibson be appointed as Alberta's first Election Commissioner. Now, I am not a member of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, so I wasn't there to witness the vote or the discussion that took place when the motion was created or the discussion before, but I understand that the motion to appoint this individual to the new position was not unanimous and did not have all-party support at the committee.

Now, I understand that members of this committee have been involved with a few other search committees over a period of time and that in those cases all members had a very good working relationship and, most importantly, were in all of those instances, at least, able to come to unanimous support. If we consider the position of the Auditor General or the position of the Ombudsman, I think it was clear that it was all-party support. I believe there was some good communication between all party members, all voices at the table were heard, and there was more of a robust discussion that led to a unanimous decision in those cases. I guess what I would say is that there was nothing partisan like what happened in the proposal to appoint this elections officer.

4:20

Madam Speaker, it appears that from the outset of this committee, that started deliberation on the choice of Election Commissioner sometime back in December of last year, it became apparent to some of the members of the Legislative Offices Committee that the members that represent the majority of the committee were ready to move ahead in a way that seemed to the opposition members somewhat hasty and somewhat jumbled. This particular search seems to have raised the eyebrows of some of the committee members that do not sit on the majority side of the committee. Those same members have suggested that they were less than satisfied or somewhat disappointed in how the majority members conducted themselves through the entire search process in this particular case.

Now, part of the minority report talks about what the four members of the Official Opposition were witnessing while the search for this new position was going on. Now, it talks about how the government members required, by use of their majority, the standing committee to compose a job posting and a position profile for a brand new position at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and to complete that task, what some would consider, I'm sure, a laborious effort, in 48 hours and, within that same time frame, determine to open the competition for this position during a time of year that certainly everyone here celebrates their Christmas holidays.

Now, all of that was done with direction from, once again, the majority members of the committee while the opposition took a strong stance suggesting that these actions would be a waste of money and would put undue strain on support staff. Now, that may

seem a little bizarre, but deciding to open the competition during Christmas holidays, which required an expensive run of print advertisements, of course, at that time of year, necessitated the need for an officer of the LAO to come into the office during their holidays in order to make deadlines so that their advertising could be put out to the public.

Now, I can imagine asking a member of the LAO to come into the office to complete such a task at such a bizarre time of year would be somewhat, I guess I would say, difficult. I dare say that the employee of the LAO may have had a few ideas as to what his Christmas holidays were actually for and that they did not include coming back into the office to open a competition for a new position at the Legislative Assembly or to take care of a run of print advertisements.

Then, once we got into January, the committee was asked for an additional \$20,000 for a second run of print advertisements. It became apparent as to why they needed that. It was because it appeared that not enough applications had been received within the proposed time in the original advertisements. Even as a member that doesn't sit on the committee, I can see why. The advertisements were sent out during Christmas holidays. What was the rush? I wonder. This couldn't wait for a week or 10 days until after the holidays were over and everybody came back to work as the due course? This committee spent an additional \$20,000 because of this seemingly horrible rush to get the advertisements out to the public at a time when they were spending time with their families and not reading the paper, probably. It makes no sense to me, Madam Speaker.

Now, we already put an amendment forward here last week to make this position's salary public, and that was defeated by the majority of the House. We've seen a range that was made public, but the committee won't allow the actual salary for the new position to become public. I guess all the talk from this side of the House when the amendment was put forward that was about transparency and accountability is something that this government would like people to believe that they believe. I'm sure they would like us all to believe that. I think Albertans deserve to know what the salary is. It fits within the sunshine list rules, but government determined that we weren't going to go there, that we were not going to let Albertans know that information.

But, Madam Speaker, that was a different amendment. Today's amendment is to amend the motion to end the contract of the Election Commissioner one year following the completion of the next general election in Alberta. This would allow the position to complete all tasks that were incurred as a result of the election, give time to create a report as a result of the election and report back to the appropriate authorities. Considering some of the things that went on in that committee, that to some may seem less than above board, it seems to me like a perfectly legitimate amendment.

Let's just get back to how we got to where we are today. When a committee takes the job of considering employment for a newly created position, certainly a position as important as Election Commissioner, which, according to the government, will root out dark money, which, of course, came along with the passing of Bill 32 in December, it seems that the committee charged with this serious task should move forward in a nonpartisan way. It seems to me that such an important posting would demand co-operation of the members from both sides of that committee. I mean, after all, we are all supposed to be working for Albertans, I believe – I think that's right – in the best interests of Albertans. I think that's right, too. I mean, after all, the committee was really tasked with doing a search for a competent applicant that could handle the chore of Election Commissioner.

I'm not saying that the proposed commissioner isn't qualified. I'm not saying that at all. I don't think any of the committee members from the opposition side ever stated anywhere along the way that Mr. Gibson was not qualified for the position. I think it's been stated in this House many times that he certainly has the proper qualifications. I understand that there were other strong, qualified candidates that made submission as well, that, in some members' minds, would have made good election commissioners as well.

When we hear that in the past there were no issues on the committee when selecting applicants in other searches and when we hear that the majority government members pushed hard to put forward a person that not all members of the committee saw as possibly the best choice, which, as I say again, was not a problem for the committee in the selections of the past, well, it kind of makes me wonder why. It makes me wonder why things became partisan all of a sudden.

You know, sometimes it takes a little or a lot of intestinal fortitude to work together with someone who sees things differently. The job of any committee that I ever sat on was to come to a consensus. Of course, most of the committees that I sat on in the past were nonpartisan in nature. But when we have seen that in the past this committee was able to put partisan ideas aside to come up with candidates that the committee could truthfully say were selected unanimously, well, Madam Speaker, that seems to go against everything that we have been talking about with regard to Motion 16. From what I can see, the majority of committee members weren't interested in working together with other committee members. It seemed to have strayed from what the committee was able to accomplish in previous searches.

Madam Speaker, it should concern all Albertans when a standing committee of the Legislature is given the task of searching for an officer of a new position and there is this kind of disagreement and irregularity, I guess is how I'll say it, from the majority members of said committee.

4:30

I'll just talk for a moment about the individual whose name was put forward here. As has been stated, I don't think there's any question that Mr. Lorne Gibson is certainly qualified for the position. This posting would not constitute the first time this individual has worked for the government of Alberta. He previously served as Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer. His job, of course, was to oversee elections between 2006 and 2009.

Now, in 2009 Mr. Gibson's contract with the government was allowed to expire. That was one year after a provincial election. Now, Madam Speaker, it appears that there was some sort of falling out, I would suggest, because two years later Mr. Gibson filed a lawsuit against the provincial government and the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. The lawsuit claimed that he had been terminated without cause and that his termination had been politically motivated. Mr. Gibson was claiming a large amount of money in compensation, but as it turns out, a judge dismissed the case and found that his employment had terminated when the contract expired as a natural course.

Now a committee of the Legislative Assembly has chosen to hire this man that, shall we say, carries a little baggage with him. Not only that, Madam Speaker, but the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Glen Resler, reminded the committee that he had not had a chance to comment on the bill that actually created the position of the Election Commissioner.

Now, the Chief Electoral Officer has been held in high regard throughout this province and has done his job very ethically. I don't think that there would be too many that challenge that statement. He has served the electoral process in Alberta well.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The member was making some important comments here in terms of the process that led us here to this amendment, and I was quite taken by some of the clarifications that he gave. I think that at one point the environment minister had said that the gentleman was fired before. Of course, there was a judge that said different after a court case. So I think there is an important clarification for the House that I didn't want anybody to miss, because the hon. member did make that.

Another thing that I think the hon. member made a good point on in his remarks is about the fact that the current Chief Electoral Officer was not given an opportunity after all these years of service to even comment on a piece of legislation to create a job that completely shadows his own. It seems incredibly disrespectful. I certainly hope that the government doesn't get accused of constructive dismissal over hiring somebody for the exact job that somebody already has and then giving him a contract for three, four years longer than the person currently in the job. It seems incredibly, incredibly, incredibly disrespectful to the current Chief Electoral Officer. Incredibly disrespectful.

To the hon. member that was just speaking, when you add all this up with the fact that the government was in such a rush to be that disrespectful by putting the ad in over the Christmas break, and essentially the government majority on the committee forced it through the House when there wasn't consensus on the committee – Madam Speaker, I'll talk about this with a little bit of context. I was on the committee that hired our Clerk. I have to say that we worked in very close and co-operative means with members on the government side, and to the ones on this committee I would say thank you. We didn't agree every day on everything, but when we finished, because it was such an independent officer of the Legislature, that needs to support us all equally and not be biased in any way, I think that was a pretty good result. Again, I'll compliment members from our side, and I will most certainly compliment every member from the government side for working together co-operatively on such an important thing to come up with a consensus.

To the hon. member: do you think it's as disrespectful to the current electoral officer as I think it is when they do something over the Christmas holidays to rush this thing out, when they don't even ask the current electoral officer about the legislation that's before us now, to give the new person with exactly the same job a contract four years longer than the current independent officer that we have? There's quite a bit of negative evidence here towards the government's motivations.

I'd ask the hon. member for his thoughts on that. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Schneider: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Hays. I don't think there would be any question that if I was the electoral officer, I'd be wondering a little bit about what the government was up to if they were hiring somebody that was actually trying to just about shadow the job that I was doing and was given a contract that was longer than the one that I had held. I know that Mr. Resler stated, you know, when he was asked to present to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices in regard to election investigations, for instance, that he actually had no issues handling current complaints that came into his office in regard to investigations. He made it very clear that he was able to handle all of those complaints in his regular duties as Chief Electoral Officer.

I mean, let's just hold it for a minute. The Chief Electoral Officer made it clear that he had no problem or issue handling current complaints that come through his office with regard to investigations. I'm not sure if we're expecting more complaints and if that's the reason why we would hire somebody that actually almost doubles what the electoral officer is doing. If the man who's doing the job is well respected and has been doing the job well, it makes you wonder why the position is needed at all. Madam Speaker, it seems . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to talk about the amendment to Motion 16. I have it sitting here in front of me. I have to say that what the amendment is trying to do, for those that just are logging in, is to take a guaranteed term of five years and say that the term for this newly created position, the Election Commissioner, should line up with the election date, like the current Chief Electoral Officer's position.

Now, I believe that this is quite reasonable. I do hear the concerns that the government is saying here. They want to make sure that they are able to find a qualified candidate. It's going to be tough to do if we only offer them potentially a two-year term. Fair enough. If he does a good job, though, he will get renewed for another term. That is how this works. What we're saying here is that the problematic part of this, going with a fixed term, is that it is possible for that term date to end in the middle of a general election. Clearly, that would be problematic.

Now, if we look at this right now, we're sitting in May. We're looking to create this position, it looks like, on May 15. What we're seeing here is that this position will go five years; that is, to May 15, 2023. Now, what we're seeing here is that if we look at the next fixed election date, that is going to be held in the spring of 2019. So if you add four years from that, that's 2023. These dates are lining up, so this is not idle speculation. We literally have the Election Commissioner's term ending most likely in the middle of a general election or even just after an election.

4:40

Now, here's the thing. When an election is called and the writ is dropped, we have no MLAs sitting in the House, which means we have no committees formed, which means we have no ability to be able to deal with an extension to this gentleman's term. What we've got here is that it is important that we have stable, transparent, and reasonable elections.

Now, this gentleman in 2008 had some issues with the election and then came in after the election with important changes to the Election Act. Why would this gentleman even want to go through that process again of having a terrible election during his term of office?

Let's move on to the fact, too, that when this gentleman last held a position as the Chief Electoral Officer, his contract ended. Now, what we've got here is that we had a legislative committee use a majority and not renew his contract for another term. What this individual did was that he sued the government, saying: wrongful dismissal. What happens to us if his term terminates and this individual sues the government in 2023? This is reasonable. This is not speculation. This has happened already once. Alberta is dealing with an election, and now we're dealing with a lawsuit happening with our Election Commissioner. This is very problematic for whatever government is looking to take office.

When you bring forward an amendment that says, "Let's line this up with elections," that's reasonable. Again, if this individual does

a good job, his term will most likely be renewed. I don't believe that anybody on my side has said that this gentleman is not qualified. He has been clearly picked by the majority of the committee. There was clear, clear concern about his potential lawsuit against Alberta, but our caucus has been saying that it appears that he has the qualifications to do the job. So if we make this 12 months after this next election, he shouldn't have a problem with an extra term. That's the key here, that they keep saying that he was fired. That is completely false. It is completely false, and a judge ruled that false. It is important to make the distinction that when you say that in this House, you're actually doing a false statement.

Now, what we're seeing here is that – I'm going to use an example for those that don't quite get this because I understand that this could be complex. Let's say that you file your taxes on time every year. April 30: you file your taxes. It makes sense that if you're deciding to choose an accountant, you're not looking for that accountant after or on April 30. That just makes sense. If you were dissatisfied with your accountant for whatever reason – it could be that you didn't like his hair that day – what happens is that . . .

An Hon. Member: Yours is excellent.

Mr. Cyr: Oh, thank you.

. . . you would complete the tax return, and then you would start the process right after the taxation year to find yourself a new accountant.

This is what we're trying to do with this amendment. What we're saying is that an election is held and the Election Commissioner has got 12 months to wrap up his cases, which is very reasonable. It's unbelievable if it took longer than 12 months. If he's got the odd case, it is likely that either he will be renewed to move forward as the commissioner or the new commissioner will be able to deal with that single case or, well, a few cases that are left.

What we've got here is an individual that is being treated differently than our Chief Electoral Officer. That brings the question: why is he being treated differently? Why is he being treated better? I understand that the government is committed down this road. I also understand that the Official Opposition filed a minority report against the hiring of this individual. It was very clear that there was clear contention regarding him, the opposition versus the government. It appears that this process was very clearly rushed. We're rushing the process, and then what happens is that we're treating him differently than our other elections officer. Why are we treating him any differently than our CEO?

It does appear to be the potential for favouritism. This is the stuff that we see when governments bring forward individuals that they choose and they say: "You know what? We're going to push him through the system. We're going to use our majority, and we're going to get this done." You know what? That rarely works well. We've seen this repeatedly. When you go and you try and force a system, usually this ends poorly. I will say that again.

You know what? I have been on the Auditor General search committee. We have just gone through this process. I have to say that our Auditor General, who has decided to retire, was a remarkable man. Mr. Merwan Saher: remarkable man. He decided that he wasn't going to renew his term, so this wasn't even that the government let his term lapse. What they did was that they started the search committee. Then what we did was that we got together as caucuses and were able to discuss the best person. We didn't rush the process. We went out with advertising across the country. We even went international. That shows you how committed we are to ensuring that our Auditor General is the best possible person to

bring accountability to Alberta. You know what? Did we agree on everything? No. But I will say that we did come out with consensus. That is a functioning committee. That is a functioning search committee. But when you have a committee that appears to be rushed, that clearly isn't a functioning search committee.

Now, what I would like to say is that it's important to understand what our current Auditor General does. Bear with me here. I've got the website open for Elections Alberta. He's got his mandate here for Elections Alberta, and I think this is important.

Elections Alberta's mandate is to:

- administer open, fair, and impartial elections;

That's good.

- provide stakeholders with the necessary information and means to participate in the democratic process;
- provide support to election officers to ensure impartial service delivery;
- serve in an advisory and regulatory role to achieve compliance in electoral finance activities;
- provide the public with disclosure through the publication of reports and financial statements;
- embrace partnership opportunities and innovative ideas by adopting best practices and new technologies from the service, business, and election communities; and
- support a positive, respectful, cohesive and self-rewarding work environment where individual aspirations can be achieved.

4:50

Wow. That office seems to know what they are trying to achieve. I believe that it showed that it worked well in 2015. If it didn't work well, there wouldn't have been a government change, because it was clear that the people of Alberta wanted change.

We've got an elections office that appears to be functioning. It appears to be doing what it's tasked to do. It appears to have a good vision. It appears to be following its mandate. So when you ask me for a five-year term for an Election Commissioner, I am saying, for one, that our Elections Alberta CEO, the Chief Electoral Officer, seems to be doing his job, but you disagree. You created a new office. Fair enough.

What I would like to say is: let's treat them the same at least. Let's at least give them the same terms. Let's at least make sure that we have some consistency because I will tell you that we'll have two people that will find working together almost impossible because they don't have matching terms. That seems problematic. We're going to have them competing with each other or unable to work with each other, figuring out where each other's boundaries are. That seems to be the big concern that I've been hearing from my colleagues. We need stability when it comes to our elections. We need to consider the fact that a five-year term isn't the way to do that.

When you start talking about us picking on Mr. Gibson, I wholeheartedly disagree. This is a good amendment. This gentleman, if he does his job, could have a 20-year, 30-year career with us. The only thing that would prevent that is if we have turmoil, which we already saw in the 2008 election.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I've been listening, of course, with a great deal of interest to the member's comments. A decent amount of them, of course, centre around this cloud, the fact that, you know, he was let go or fired, perhaps, as some might describe that. I was hoping to provide a little bit of context and then ask a question to you, hon. member.

I'll just do a quote here from a Graham Thomson article to have a little bit of background about where that cloud came from. The article says:

He poked, prodded and embarrassed the PC government-of-the-day by pointing out serious shortcomings in the 2008 general election, where 27 per cent of voters were left off the list and some people waited hours to vote.

Gibson complained he couldn't conduct a proper enumeration of voters because of Alberta's bizarre, antiquated and unfair practice where the PCs controlled the system of nominating returning officers for each riding. Yes, you read that right. The PCs, through cabinet, controlled who would be the chief ballot-counter in every constituency. It was the stuff of banana republics.

Gibson made 182 recommendations . . .

which I have right here,

. . . to improve the system, including allowing the chief electoral officer to appoint returning officers. The government eventually adopted many of his suggestions a few years later, but Gibson had proven to be such a thorn in the government's side that in 2009 PC MLAs voted not to renew his contract, effectively firing him.

Madam Speaker, I'm sure that I will have a chance to table that in the Legislature tomorrow for all members.

Now, let's have a look at what some of those recommendations mean. If anyone is interested, I am looking at the Report on the March 3, 2008 Provincial General Election of the Twenty-seventh Legislative Assembly. For those of you who are looking for a copy from our library, which is open at this late hour, this is – wow, that's a really long item ID. I won't read that into the record, but if you ask our librarians downstairs, they will be able to find this for you.

It starts off that one of the chief recommendations, to provide that full context, is this:

Returning Officers who manage enumerations and elections are currently appointed by Order in Council. When the Writs of Election are issued, Returning Officers appoint their assistants, the Election Clerks, to support them throughout the election period. The Election Clerk is the Returning Officer's primary support during the election period and may be requested to fulfil the responsibilities of the Returning Officer if [they are] unable or unwilling to act. When this occurs, there is a strong probability that the Election Clerk could be called on to act with minimal notice, so it is essential that the Election Clerk is qualified to act, should the need arise.

Now, the key part is in the next sentence here.

Returning Officers and Election Clerks are the most visible election officers during an election and, therefore, must be perceived by voters, candidates and the political parties to represent an electoral system that is fair and impartial. Their independence in both fact and perception helps to assure the public of the integrity of election administration within the province.

That line and the recommendations that came out of it – you can keep reading in the report from pages 63, 64, 65, and so on. It goes on to around page 130-ish. There are a great deal of recommendations there from the officer that caused such a problem for the government of the day that they decided to not renew his appointment, which effectively fired him. That was the interpretation from the media and the opposition of the day, that that was in fact what was happening.

My question to the hon. member is that, you know, if he feels that there's such a cloud, the cloud is that he spoke truth to power. If that is a problem, why is it that he has issues with a person who's got a demonstrated record of having spoken truth to power, has a demonstrated record of speaking up to the government of the day to ensure that elections are run fairly? I wonder why he's doing that. Or is he, like his government colleagues, going to continue to

needlessly filibuster Mr. Gibson's appointment to prevent him from getting to the good work of making sure that our elections are fair? Those are the two questions, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Cyr: With these last 10 seconds I have repeatedly said that he's qualified for this job, sir – repeatedly said that – so to say that I'm putting a cloud on this man's career is completely incorrect.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Here we are again. You know, I actually have quite a few questions for the Member for Calgary-Currie, although I know and I understand that I'm not in that opportunity to ask those questions at this time. Certainly, things were going through my head at the time when he was speaking. A question I would, if given the opportunity, ask him, of course, would be: are we going to take the word of a journalist in an article, or are we going to take the word of a judge in a court ruling? This certainly is something that pops into my mind. A contract that wasn't renewed is not somebody who is fired, but I guess that's something we will obviously agree to disagree on.

I will stand up here, though, in front of you, Madam Speaker, to of course support this amendment, a term of five years commencing May 15, 2018, and substituting "a term commencing May 15, 2018, and expiring 12 months after polling day for the next provincial general election in Alberta." As many of my colleagues have stood up here already, it's something that is a very reasonable amendment.

I've already brought up during one of my opportunities that it certainly raises some questions, and it is curious. It provides doubt as to why the government would have a contract that would potentially end in the middle of an election cycle, that would be May 2023. As my colleague and friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake rightly pointed out, during an election none of us are MLAs, so there is not an opportunity or an ability to rehire somebody if that contract was to end in the middle of, again, an election cycle.

5:00

As I discussed with my friend from Calgary-Hays, you know, this is something that would be chaos. I mean, again, if we have a position that is supposed to be so critical – so critical – why would we have it end in the middle of May of 2023, which would throw an election cycle into sheer chaos? Like, this is not what I would believe to be a wacky, crazy amendment, Madam Speaker. This is a very reasonable amendment. I think that some of the arguments, of course, that are being made are reasonable arguments. It does not make sense for this contract to end in May of 2023.

It raises questions. It raises doubts. It raises the question: is the government – you know, we have to believe what the Premier has said, that she's going to abide by the current legislation and that they are going to have that election in May of 2019. I can tell you on behalf of my friend from Calgary-Hays that not doing that will have some severe and negative consequences.

Mr. McIver: As we learned.

Mr. Ellis: As we learned, right?

You know, again, it raises doubt. Is this government going to have this election in May of 2019? Are they planning on extending it, or are they planning on bringing it forward? I don't know. But certainly it does not make sense for this individual's contract to end in May of 2023.

Then, you know, we talk about much that has been brought up about Mr. Resler, the Chief Electoral Officer. Nobody has had any disparaging comments to say. I believe that everybody believes that

the work he does is important. I believe there is much respect for Mr. Resler. Again, we talk about the feelings of that individual. I think it's very important. Let's think about that. You have a gentleman that is supposed to be working alongside what, again, has been pointed out to be a very important position, the Election Commissioner. Well, you've just hired somebody to do a job that is similar to the one that he's already doing. He's already indicated to the committee that his department can do that job.

Again, it brings us back to duplicity. Why are we spending money on a position that really can be done by somebody that has already said that they're able to do the work that needs to be done? Nobody is disputing that the work needs to be done but is questioning why we are spending whatever that amount of money is. I've heard various reports of a couple million dollars, I think, and somebody can certainly correct me if I'm wrong. Certainly, that is a concern, that we are going to be wasting money on a position that's already going to be done or could be done by Mr. Resler and his staff, right?

Another point here. You know, let's assume that this amendment is going to go through, Madam Speaker. Let's assume that it's going to go through. Although the government appears to have indicated that they're not going to support it, let's just assume that it's going to go through. I think it's very reasonable. I think back to the career that I had working for an association which we call the police union. I mean, even as a police officer after 18 months they reviewed whether or not they were going to keep me. If I was doing a good job, if I was serving the public in the way that was asked of me in the contract that I signed with the city of Calgary, then, of course, they would continue to hire me for the X number of years that an individual chooses to stay with that particular department.

To take a look at this one year after the election: I don't think that's unreasonable. I think that, you know, Mr. Gibson, if he's working hard, he's doing a good job, he's showing value for his work, then, sure, he'll likely be reappointed, which happens with many other departments, with many other services, with many other unions. It's very, very important, right? You can't just give somebody – again, as one of my colleagues pointed out, even in the private sector it's very unusual to just hire somebody for a five-year period of time with really no checks, no balances, not really much of anything.

You know, again, Madam Speaker, I think what's really going through my head, that I just can't seem to figure out, is why this contract is ending in May of 2023. It just does not make sense. I have to question: was this just naïveté from this government? Did they just not notice? This government has been commonly known over the last several years as the government of unintended consequences. What would the unintended consequences be of an individual that is going to end his contract in the middle of an election cycle, in 2023? Does that mean that Mr. Resler is going to have to do the work that he's already indicated he can do? That's a good question. That's assuming that he, of course, gets rehired. His contract may or may not end. I mean, these are questions that I think we all have.

You know, Madam Speaker, I have to bring this up. I brought this up during one of my first talks on the main motion itself, and it has to do with the confidence, the overconfidence, the arrogance. I know I brought this up, and I'm not meant to be a broken record in this particular case, but I sat and I watched – I watched – the arrogance, the Member for Calgary-Hays and myself. We saw it. We saw it, and those people are no longer here. Here we have it again, just going to force stuff through.

I know. I've talked to people that were in the previous government, Madam Speaker. They got their marching orders from the person at the top that says: you will hire that person no matter

what anybody says. I see the threads, the common threads. I wish the government would see those threads, but they don't. That's very, very, very sad, really, to see. We have four individuals from the previous government, that sat over there, and they watched. I'm watching them make some of the same mistakes, the same mistakes that my colleagues were making when I was just new to this Legislature.

But who am I? I'm not part of the government. I'm part of the Official Opposition. I'm here to offer my opinion, to represent the people of Calgary-West. Certainly, you know, the government can choose to listen to the Official Opposition or not. That's fine. We've seen what happened in 2015 with a government that chose not to listen to, maybe, recommendations from the Official Opposition on that side, from members of the parties that sat over there, the Liberals who sat over there, the NDP that sat over there. I sat there. I watched. And maybe – maybe – for this government, if they choose to listen to this recommendation, to maybe listen to a few recommendations, there might be some opportunity. There might be some opportunity for the future.

5:10

I want to talk maybe a little bit here about Mr. Resler and talk a little bit about how he would feel, of course, when you have an individual who comes in, even though he has indicated the he can do the same job, that his department can do the same job. Mr. Resler has witnessed this government giving the new person, who would be the Election Commissioner, Mr. Gibson, a large extension past Mr. Resler's existing contract. I certainly would like to know if the salary is similar, but they're not disclosing how much Mr. Gibson is making. That certainly brings into question an opportunity for Mr. Resler to maybe feel even worse if that's even possible. You know, I think that it is very unfair for Mr. Resler. I think it's unfair for his department.

Now, what I would like to see, of course, is that if Mr. Gibson is indeed hired, which I believe he is, to go through the process – my understanding is that he hasn't signed a contract yet. When he does, which seems like it's going to be the case, although I hope that this Legislature listens and this amendment goes through so that there is an amendment to that contract, I think it's very important for all Albertans and for everyone in this Legislature that if they are going to be working together that these two individuals work together as a team, that they're going to work cohesively, and that there will not be any barriers between them because both of them are providing a vital service to the people of Alberta for a fair and open and transparent election.

Madam Speaker, you know, I get to listen to always being accused of having rich friends, but I'm a very simple police officer. I'm a working guy. My friend from Calgary-Hays is a butcher.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. You know, I have to say that it's important to hear that a lot of us have occupations outside of politics. The thing is that that gives us this life experience of being able to see some concerns as they arise. Some of us can take those life experiences and put them towards, in this case, a motion, an amendment that's coming forward.

You know, when I hear the Member for Calgary-West state that he is using some of his experience through law enforcement and how it relates to a decision we're making in the House, I think there's value in that. I truly do see value in that. What happens here is that if we were to start to go down this road and start going with mandatory terms for our officers or accountants or, in the case of

Calgary-Hays, butchers, you can see that this could be problematic if it's not structured correctly.

What would be the ideal time, do you think, Member for Calgary-West? Do you think that it's a year after the election date? Do you think that we could have ended it on the election date like what the NDP are planning with 2023? Do you think that the ideal time would be before the election date by a year? What do you think would be the appropriate time for it?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. You know, my opinion on this, I guess, would be consistent with what I'm seeing in this amendment to this motion. I believe that it is very reasonable to have this term end a year after the election. You know, as indicated by my friend from Chestermere-Rocky View, it gives a year for somebody to clear up any sort of issues or abnormalities or just work that may need to get cleared up, which is a lot of time. I know my friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake is an accountant by trade, so he certainly has more experience than I do when it comes to clearing up work on a desk. In my previous career my work was in a car – that's where my office was – so I certainly can appreciate what he is saying.

You know, to have any sort of change – again, we assume that we have these two positions that are going to come forward here. To have them begin or end close to the important election date I think is hugely problematic. I think that it would cause potential chaos in the system. So to have a review, if you want to call it that – I mean, we called it a probationary period, as I was indicating, as part of the union that I had previously belonged to – to have that at a time that is a year past the election date I think is extremely reasonable. I think that would provide a sufficient amount of time for Mr. Gibson to clear up any of the work that he needs to do, and as I've already indicated, if he's working well and he's doing a good job and he's providing value to this Legislature and, more importantly, to the people of Alberta, then there is really no reason why whoever is the government at that particular time would not renew his contract.

It is absolutely peculiar, as has been indicated here in this House already today, why you would have a contract that ends literally at a time that we can only assume is in the middle of a writ period, in 2023, unless there is going to potentially be some alternate date that is going to come up in 2019. That's the only reasonable conclusion that one can extrapolate from the information that we're being provided here, that are we really – I think that's the question.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Madam Speaker, thank you very much. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak in favour of the notice of amendment. I'm grateful to my colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View that she proposes that Government Motion 16 be amended by striking out "a term of five years commencing May 15, 2018," and substituting "a term commencing on May 15, 2018, and expiring 12 months after polling day for the next provincial general election in Alberta."

Madam Speaker, two or three overriding general observations to start with. Honestly, I'm surprised we're here, when the electoral officer said that he could do the position with his staff, with his mandate. Of course, the Official Opposition stood up and conveyed that as well as our committee and our dissenting members. We expressed the savings. Sometimes smaller departments and fewer employees are better for focus and actually doing the work right.

Certainly, we believe in trusting our experts. We believe in local decision-making. My goodness, 87 of us miles away from this House certainly cannot make better decisions. That being what it is, of course, the government, in the same heavy-handed manner that they handled the committee, refused to listen to that and voted that down.

5:20

Now our electoral officer, faced with not being listened to, rebuked at that point in time, is looking at a situation where the government chooses to give the new person a contract, the Election Commissioner, four years longer than the person he'll be working closely with. And you know the potential amazement and the potential problems that could arise from that.

You know, Madam Speaker, everyone makes mistakes, and some mistakes are easy to correct. We spent some time talking about this bill a week or so ago, trying to advocate for the taxpayer, advocate for the people of Alberta to ensure that the wage would be on the sunshine list earlier, quickly, so that we could have more sunlight to clearly show Albertans maybe some of the intentions, maybe some of the reasons, and maybe some good things as to why the government was going to do that. Of course, two or three hours ago the Government House Leader stood up and apologized – and rightfully so; he handled it very well – and said: I made a mistake; we're going to correct it. Easy to correct. Thank you, Government House Leader, for doing that.

But, Madam Speaker, if this is another mistake by the government, if this is yet another mistake with a five-year term, after hours and hours of Alberta's loyal opposition standing here, highlighting this, showing all the pitfalls, respectfully, and making great amendments to reduce the exposure for the taxpayer, to reduce, you know, maybe some friction and some problems that our electoral officer may have, and of course not getting a response, not getting a positive movement from the other side – it was easy three hours ago to stand up: I made a mistake, and I'll correct it. One, two, three, or four years from now it may be a heck of a lot harder to stand up and say: I made a mistake. The NDP government made a mistake, and we need to correct it.

Again, I think back to the families and the communities in Alberta. Unfortunately, a lot of them are struggling with high taxes, with high utility rates, making much less than they did. This government owes it to every single one of them to get as much value for their hard-earned tax dollars as possible and, wherever possible, to leave them as much money as possible so that they can care for their own families.

This committee threw \$20,000 away over Christmas even though every single opposition member on the committee stood up and said: don't do it; don't do it; do it right the first time; get it right the first time. But in reckless fashion, with a lack of regard for taxpayer dollars and a lack of regard for getting the process right the first time – Madam Speaker, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it was just inexperience. You know, maybe it wasn't a fast movement towards a predetermined decision. Maybe it was just a \$20,000 mistake that somebody who's out working tonight, a first responder or a nurse or somebody standing on an oil well, has to pay for us. Maybe it was just a mistake. Maybe it was just inexperience.

Again, maybe this is a mistake, too. I absolutely believe it's a mistake. I absolutely think that when we have our electoral officer say that the position is not needed and tell the people of Alberta that he can do the job and save us money. Now the government is forcing this on him, on us with a five-year commitment. Of course, we know the range that the hiring had to be at, I guess, from the orders and the prescription that was out there, but Albertans don't know what it's going to be, and it'll be over a year until we do. This

may end up being a very, very costly mistake, again, caused by a lack of respect for how hard people actually have to work to earn tax dollars.

I want to come back to, you know, some of the words I've heard while I've been sitting here listening for two hours: reckless, irresponsible, rushed, no transparency, waste. Five of the things that I've heard the most are reckless, irresponsible, rushed, waste, lack of transparency. This thing is a mess. This thing has been a mess from start to finish in a government-dominated committee. Again, not knowing how so much, you know, advice from – start with Mr. Resler, an excellent officer for the people of Alberta, an excellent reputation. In my six years it's all been good. For his advice to be so totally disregarded absolutely leaves me speechless, hopefully not for the next 10 minutes, but . . .

Mr. Mason: It's a figure of speech.

Mr. Barnes: I see.

Madam Speaker, it's amazing. That's one of the reasons why this government should back up now. This government can put the brakes on. We have a top top-quality officer with top top-quality staff who's saying: we can do the job.

So okay. It's the government's decision. They're the majority. They're forcing their will on the people of Alberta and on the Official Opposition. But it does give us some time. Madam Speaker, it gives us some time to change the terms of the contract, to go back to the other individual, which I believe is Mr. Gibson. Hiring people is a two-way process, the employee and the employer. And we are representing the people of Alberta, again, the people of Alberta that tonight will be saving somebody's life on a nursing ward, creating tremendous wealth and providing jobs, you know, 50 miles from the nearest community standing on an oil well.

I spent a little bit of time on Twitter earlier today, and my goodness, I'm already seeing in Cypress-Medicine Hat ranchers that are praying for rain. They need it instantly or will be faced with selling top-quality breeding cattle that they've nurtured and improved, feeding Albertans and feeding the world for tens and tens and hundreds of years. These are the people that are paying the taxes. These people are why we're here.

Madam Speaker, when I read words in this dissenting opinion from my four caucus colleagues – and I thank them for their work and their courage, my colleague from Airdrie, my colleague from Calgary-Greenway, from Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, or BMW as I heard the other day, and Chestermere-Rocky View – here are some of the things that they said in April 2018.

We have long been disappointed in how members of the government caucus chose to conduct themselves throughout the entire search process . . .

Well, I think we can add to that: through the entire amendment process in the Legislature.

. . . in a reckless fashion by forcing the Legislative Assembly Office to compose a job posting and position profile for a brand new position in less than 48 hours, and deciding to open the competition during the Christmas holidays.

This is probably an appropriate time for me to tell everyone about how on the Christmas holidays I took my three boys and their three girlfriends and my wife down to Cancún and what a great holiday we had.

But how many quality people that would have been eligible for this job were doing the same somewhere with their family, somewhere with their friends, somewhere where they weren't able to reply? You know, Madam Speaker, I don't and the Official Opposition doesn't take any pride in being able to say: I told you so. So this NDP government had to then take \$20,000 out of

Families and Communities' pockets, an additional \$20,000, for a second run of print advertisements and maybe end up with where they were headed all along.

5:30

The last sentence of that paragraph really concerns me. "We also took issue with being strong armed by government MLAs." We get it. They're the majority. They have control of the Legislature and all the committees, but, Madam Speaker, that is not how you lead. "We also took issue with being strong armed by government MLAs who would declare that a consensus had been reached on issues in camera and would try to force votes with little to no discussion." Little to no discussion, stacking the deck with the majority of the members.

Of course, we've heard some of the past history of the candidate, and we've also heard from many people on the opposition side that the candidate is good and there appear to be a lot of reasons that he should be hired. Of course, what this debate is about is the terms and the process. We've heard many, many people stand up and talk about how a five-year term may collide directly with this next election, not the one that Albertans hope to have March 1 to May 31 next year but the one that may fall four years after that. If this servant of Alberta is doing a good job five years from now – and I hope he is – does that mean a 10-year contract five years from now? It will be right in a very, very delicate time zone. Madam Speaker, we can correct this problem now.

You know, I also understand that Mr. Resler, our elections officer – the expiry of his contract matches what my colleague from Chestermere is proposing, 12 months after the polling day for the next provincial general election. Twelve months after the polling day. As has been stated many times on this side, if there are a few little things to organize or, let's say, a minority government is in place in a year and . . . [Mr. Barnes' speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, I have to say that I have an incredible respect for my colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat. I have to say that when I first became an MLA, he was very helpful in trying to guide myself and a lot of my colleagues through the process. I'm also thankful for the other, in our case, Wildrose MLAs that had gone through the purge, if you will. [interjections] I'm sorry. I wasn't meaning to be funny. But what I will say, though, what I'm trying to bring up here, is that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has been at this for a while. He's seen search committees. He's seen committee work. He's also one of the most respectful men of this Legislature when it comes to our committees.

So, you know, when we see something happen like what happened with this search committee, when we've got contention on this committee, I'm just curious. It seems like the government is saying that all we're out to do is to get this individual. I don't believe that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is out to get Mr. Gibson. I do believe that he's asking reasonable questions. I think we've got a reasonable amendment before us. Why are we not lining these up?

I would like to hear from the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. You've been through committees. It would be great to see maybe the House leader from the government side even speak on this, on how he sees committees work. It's the experienced parliamentarians that we've got here that we should be looking to to improve. They've

been through the process longer. I've been here for three years. I do believe that we can always get better at what we're trying to do. It comes to compromise.

Will you speak on other committees that you've been part of, sir, and do you see that the committee that we had, the search committee for this new position, is problematic?

The Deputy Speaker: Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you for that. I greatly appreciate it. Just quickly, the first thing that came to mind was that when I was fortunate enough to be elected in 2012, one of the first committees I was on was Resource Stewardship. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity at the time was our chairperson, and I think back to what a great job she did. I guess it's fair to say that there were many things that were on that committee that, when it came to my inexperience, I was as green as grass in many ways. She started to bring in people that presented to us about indigenous peoples' rights and their way of life and how that would be impacted by hydro developments and lots of the proponents of it and the people that were going to be affected. My goodness, I learned so much, and it was so respectful, and it was just a great opportunity to put things forward.

Then the next step was the bullet train between Calgary and Edmonton. She brought in a lot of people that wanted to talk about how that was going to happen. It was an amazing, amazing educational experience to hear that there are only one or two of them in the whole world that actually pay for themselves. Of course, they're in centres of 10 million and 20 million people. Probably the thing that was the easiest for me to remember was that because this train was going to be going 220 miles an hour, if it even hit a rabbit, it could derail the whole train, so it was totally crucial to have these fences and guard it and make sure nothing like that happened. It was a real opportunity to share information and learn.

You know, I even remember at one point the Wildrose legacy caucus – I can't remember exactly what we were talking about at the time, but there was talk of a dissenting opinion on something. I remember the committee pulling together and talking about it and working it out. Because it was a step away from where we were actually making laws and . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Mason: Well, the hon. member asked me a question. Unfortunately, my colleague used all the time, so he has learned some things since he was first elected, in 2012.

The question that was asked is: what is my experience of committees? Well, my experience of committees is that you have discussions, you have an agenda, you debate the issues, and you reach a consensus if you can. If you can't, you take a vote, and whoever has the most votes wins. Then the matter is settled.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any questions or comments?

Mr. Cyr: Well, thank you for that, sir. I do appreciate you getting up. You know, I do say that it was great to see that you, I believe, got a 10-year pin. Was it you that got a 10-year pin?

Mr. Mason: Fifteen.

5:40

Mr. Cyr: I apologize. A 15-year pin. We do have some very experienced parliamentarians here.

Now, as the minister has been in opposition and he has been able to feel when government uses its majority to push something

through a committee, is it not frustrating for you to see something like that happen, to not even try to come to some compromise, sir? I truly believe that working on compromise – and as I said before, with the search committee for the Auditor General, it didn't mean that we agreed on everything, sir. But we were able to come to compromise, and I believe we picked Mr. Wylie. He is going to be the best Auditor General we have for Alberta going forward. You know what? I think that process worked.

To the minister: do you feel that it is appropriate that we are pushing things through these committees very quickly and, in this case, that we had missed the fact that a five-year term is not appropriate for this man? Thank you, sir.

Mr. Mason: Well, Madam Speaker, I wasn't a member of the committee, but I have indeed served on many committees. I've often found it frustrating, to be sure, but I've also found that when I had some good, constructive points to make, they were often listened to with sympathy and occasionally incorporated into the decisions of the committee.

But one of the things that I recognized, whether I was frustrated or not, was that we have certain principles of democracy that we operate in this House, which is based on debate and votes, and that that is how decisions are made in this place on bills, on motions, on all manner of things. The proportion of seats on committees is equivalent to the proportion of seats in the Assembly, which is in fact determined by a free vote of the electors in an election. Ultimately, refusal to accept the decision of the majority after fair debate really amounts to a rejection of the choices that have been made by voters and is not in its essence democratic. I would urge the members opposite to recognize that we operate under certain principles of democracy in this place and in our society and to respect those.

With the greatest of respect to the opposition, we need to move on to much more important business of the public. We have pipelines. We have health care. We have an electricity system. There are many issues before this House that need to be resolved. It is the people's business, Madam Speaker, and we need to show respect to the public, that we use our time wisely in this Assembly and focus on the things that are most important to the public as opposed to being concerned about someone who may have in the past brought forward a number of recommendations which quite embarrassed the previous government.

For example, of course, the long-standing practice in this province where the governing party appointed all of the returning officers in every constituency in the province was an outrageous abuse of democracy. In this case, Mr. Gibson, as the Chief Electoral Officer, brought forward recommendations to do away with that, which the government of the day found very awkward. There are many other quite good recommendations that were made, in all honesty, that the Conservative government didn't like. Some of them have been adopted since; most notably, the notorious system of political appointees as returning officers. But there are others that have been subsequently adopted. The awkwardness and embarrassment that it cost the government of the day was in part why they got rid of him and why they're opposing this now, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to this amendment, particularly after the hon. House leader made some comments. I mean, let's be very clear. This motion is to

appoint Lorne Gibson as the Election Commissioner. That's what the government motion is. The Election Commissioner, at least as told to me by the government, is an extremely important position. That's what members of the committee said. So I find it interesting that the Government House Leader may not agree with that statement that the committee members are making.

However, we are here, and our democracy is extremely important, Madam Speaker. You know, to say that debating this here today fulsomely is not as important as some of the other business that the government may have would appear to be a little bit confusing to some of the members of the committee and/or to the Government House Leader. I don't really know which is which.

Madam Speaker, also, in addition to government business, there have been a number of opportunities where this government could have – let's say particular to the pipeline legislation, where there's an urgency to get this legislation passed. You know, there would certainly be a willingness from members in the Official Opposition to expedite that process and get that moving through. Certainly, that's not what's been happening with this government.

There have been a number of bills additionally, Madam Speaker, that the government isn't offering debate on. In fact, the Official Opposition has been carrying much of the debate on most of the bills in this Legislature. I would think that the statement about moving on to other business, having more important things to do is not the whole truth.

I know that the people in my constituency of Airdrie are very in tune to this new position that's been created by the NDP government and the process that it's taken to get there. They don't really know much about it. The government refuses to disclose the salary. The Chief Electoral Officer says that this position is redundant because that's what he already does, so in addition to insulting the Chief Electoral Officer in bringing this position – and I still would like to get some questions answered for my constituents in Airdrie, who absolutely deserve to be represented in this debate as we move forward.

Madam Speaker, the amendment that's on the table was moved by my hon. colleague the MLA for Chestermere-Rocky View, who made some really good points in her debate. I particularly agree strongly with this amendment. This is an amendment that's consistent already with the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. There's nothing unusual about what's going on here. It's, in fact, consistent with other things. It's an easy talking point for the government: well, you know, we chose this term because it's consistent with almost exactly the same office in another manner. I don't really understand why the government is treating this new Election Commissioner differently than they are treating the Chief Electoral Officer. I think that's a bit of a concern. Why does the new Election Commissioner have a better contract or a better deal than the Chief Electoral Officer? It doesn't make any sense. I would think the government would agree, being consistent and open and honest and transparent, that they should be treated the same, but they don't, and I would be concerned as to why they think that.

Madam Speaker, there's been a lot of controversy surrounding this whole situation, and this government is trying to make this debate about the person in particular whereas the Official Opposition has a lot of concerns about the process and how we got here in the first place. We've offered a number of suggestions on how to make the government's decision to create the position in the first place and then to hire the Election Commissioner a whole lot better. But they are choosing to, you know, keep things secret and blame us in the Official Opposition for filibustering, which, in fact, is not true. This is the first time I've been able to speak to the amendment, which I think is so important.

5:50

I think that Albertans deserve to have this fulsome debate, Madam Speaker. In fact, if the Official Opposition hadn't been offering such good suggestions along the way in regard to this motion, we wouldn't have gotten to a point where we heard the hon. Government House Leader stand up today and say: actually, I made a mistake. "You're welcome," is probably what I would say and what should be said, maybe, because that's an extremely important part.

The government voted down an amendment to make the new Election Commissioner's salary public – right? – and their whole argument at the time was that it will be made public in due course, the way that everything else is made public. That was the argument of the government. It was the only argument of the government, truly. But then we find out that isn't even true. The whole debate isn't even true. I actually wonder if we should reintroduce the amendment. I don't know if there's a process to do that, but I think that the government would probably, certainly, appreciate an opportunity to be able to have a debate on some facts. We have those now, and that's certainly because the Official Opposition has taken the time to do research and to consult with constituents and to be able to come back here and bring that expertise to the House and debate it here.

I know that my constituents in Airdrie don't want to see this Election Commissioner be treated any differently than the Chief Electoral Officer. They don't want that. Certainly not. This is an amendment that would bring those two in line with one another.

Like has been said before, Madam Speaker, if the Election Commissioner does a good job, he could have a very long career. You know, there are certainly some concerns that the contract will run out and the committee at the time won't renew it and that then there'll be another lawsuit against the government, which was not successful the first time. However, there's always a considerable amount of time and money and effort put into these things when one is faced with such legal proceedings.

There are just so many things, right? There are just so many things. It's like, you know, if you have a problem employee, Madam Speaker, or in an interview process. I don't know if you've hired anybody before. I'm fairly certain you have. You're a very accomplished woman. If somebody comes in to see you and they're applying for the job, but you kind of have a, "Why did you leave your last job?" and there's a little bit of uncertainty around the explanation as to why they left their last position, in your head and in your heart of hearts you know that something is off. You also don't necessarily have multiple newspaper articles with additional information that you can refer to. I wouldn't want to speak on your behalf or for you or assume anything, but I would think that sort of in a case like that, you probably wouldn't proceed to the next phase of the interview process.

But that's exactly what happened in this committee, and there's some concern. And the Official Opposition is not the only one with concerns. The members of the committee are not the only ones with concerns, Madam Speaker. Albertans are concerned. You know, this is an individual, an office that will be interacting with the public, that have significant powers that are different from what the Chief Electoral Officer has.

No one here is suggesting that we shouldn't have investigations. I mean, there's always an – the work that the Chief Electoral Officer currently does is extremely important, and I value the work that he's done, the help that he's given to the public, the investigations that he has pursued and made rulings on. There are a number of people that can't run for any elected positions here in Alberta that are

clearly listed on the website. Those were investigations that occurred, and there was a ruling that was made on those.

But apparently that doesn't matter anymore, Madam Speaker, so the NDP created another position, another couple of million bucks, saying, "Who cares, right?" It's not real money; it's just numbers, a piece of paper for this government. They created a redundant position that, at best, has been described as part-time. Why don't we see if this even works? What if this isn't something that the government likes after the next election? I suspect they might not because the results are going to be a little bit different than what they think they are, despite their efforts to stack the deck. This government isn't willing to put their money where their mouth is.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Airdrie was the floor, and it's getting awfully noisy back here. If you've got conversations, please take them outside of the House.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. It's hard to put some thoughts together with the chattering, so that was very good. I appreciate that.

I was just saying, Madam Speaker, in regard to this amendment that we are currently discussing to Government Motion 16, to strike out "a term of five years commencing May 15, 2018" and substitute "a term commencing on May 15, 2018, and expiring 12 months after polling day for the next provincial general election in Alberta" that this is an amendment that mirrors the language for the Chief Electoral Officer. It's a position that the NDP government has taken from the Chief Electoral Officer, added a whole bunch of money to and time and whatever and created what is new in the Election Commissioner's pile over here. I don't know why it would be treated any differently. It's the same thing. It went from here to here, right? That's it, but a whole bunch of extra money and time and all that kind of stuff.

I guess I'm having a hard time, Madam Speaker, trying to figure out why this position and this particular legislative officer are receiving special treatment from the NDP government. I think Albertans are going to have a hard time with that, too, but we have

an opportunity and the government still has an opportunity, when we vote, to provide the people of Alberta with peace of mind in that no favouritism is happening. You know, this individual works for all Albertans, not the NDP government but all Albertans, and I just don't understand a scenario, Madam Speaker, in which the NDP would not think that that is okay. They make the rules. They can certainly go back to the Election Commissioner and explain that because of the redundancy in the position that has been created, we have to treat everybody the same because that's the right thing to do. I know that the new – I would assume. I mean, I shouldn't assume, but I would probably be safe that the new . . .

6:00

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I know that my time is going to be limited, but I'd just like to comment that you mentioned the words "stacking the deck." It seems to be a catchphrase whenever this government deals with anything to do with the upcoming election. I think we talked about it on Bill 32, where the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre used "stacking the deck" a number of times, and there was a little bit of diatribe between him and the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills where they went: stacking the deck, stacking the deck, stacking the deck. It kind of gives that appearance when you look at – you know, they question us as to what we would have against this person being appointed, which he was, so the question it begs is as to: what do you have to gain by forcing and appointing this person? I'd like to remind the government that this person was a man that actually sued the Alberta government and lost.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:01 p.m.]

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