



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 20, 2018

Day 50

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature

Fourth Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

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

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),

Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition

Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (NDP)

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)

Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)

Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP),

Alberta Party Opposition House Leader

Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (NDP)

Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (NDP)

Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)

Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (NDP),

Government Whip

Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (UCP)

Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)

Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)

Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UCP)

Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)

Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UCP)

Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (NDP)

Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)

Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP),

Deputy Government House Leader

Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (FCP)

Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (NDP)

Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (AP)

Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (NDP),

Deputy Government House Leader

Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (Ind)

Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)

Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Conklin (UCP)

Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)

Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)

Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (UCP)

Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (NDP)

Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)

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Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UCP),

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Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (NDP),

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Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (UCP)

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Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)

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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)

Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)

Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)

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Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)

van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)

Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),

Deputy Government Whip

Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)

Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)

Party standings:

New Democratic: 53 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 3 Alberta Liberal: 1 Freedom Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Progressive Conservative: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 20, 2018

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group of home-schoolers from in and around the Fort Saskatchewan area. We have students accompanied by their parents and teachers, including Mrs. Venessa Kalist, Mrs. Tammy Burgardt, Mrs. Caryn Troost, Mrs. Tonya Collins, Mrs. Karen Hipson, and Mr. Vern Cripps along with a couple more, Mrs. Tammy Froese and Mrs. Shelley Brewer. If they could all stand with their lovely young guests and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you 66 students from the Edmonton Christian northeast school. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Elaine Junk and Greg Gurnett, along with their chaperones: Susana Maki, Jexy David, Julia Adams, Chan Lu, Sindy Weber, and Chris Maluta. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other school groups? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to introduce on your behalf Margaret Carroll from the town of High Level in your constituency of Peace River. Margaret is an owner of M&M Real Estate in High Level and is a strong business leader and community advocate. She is the director of the Grande Prairie real estate board, a past copresident of the High Level chamber of commerce, and was recently nominated for the Alberta women entrepreneurs award. Margaret is seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I'd ask her to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce four absolutely outstanding Albertans all in their own right. They are all school board trustees. There is literally no one in our province more undervalued than school board trustees, and I know that from the bottom of my heart they all deserve even more praise and support from all of us and all Albertans because what they do is the truest form of public service. So it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Holly Bilton, the chair of the rural caucus of ASBA; Colleen Butler, the chair of Chinook's Edge school division; Sherry Cooper, a trustee from Chinook's Edge school division – no relation; I say that for her benefit, not mine, because I could be so honoured to be related to her – and Melissa Copley, a school board trustee for Chinook's Edge school division, also my long-suffering, immediate next-door

neighbour. If you'd please welcome them in the traditional fashion to the Assembly, I know that they and I would greatly appreciate it.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly my legislative co-ordinator and his family. Now, my legislative co-ordinator, Mr. Jesse Robertson, has only been with me for a short time, but in that time he has shown that he is not only a true conservative but somebody that can actually ride herd over me and make sure that I'm where I'm supposed to be and know what I'll need to be saying.

Mr. Cooper: Now that's a special skill.

Mr. Smith: Yes, it is.

With him is his wife, Colleen Robertson. She's a hard-working, home-schooling mom, a former registered nurse. She volunteers with youth, loves to mentor young people, and does so when they're at a very formative time in their lives. With him is Madison Robertson, age seven, who is in grade 2 and loves to read, loves creating art, and her favourite colour is gold. Now, Malcolm Robertson is age six, in grade 1, and he loves to wrestle and he loves to ride his bike and he loves to build Lego, so at some point in time we're going to have to get together and have some fun. Lastly, Isobel Robertson, age five. She's in kindergarten, and she loves music, she loves to dance, which I do very poorly, and she is very kind and considerate. If I could have the Robertson family stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Reeve Leanne Beaupre, Harold Bulford, Daryl Beeston, Ross Sutherland, Bob Marshall, Peter Harris, Linda Waddy, Karen Rosvold, Lesley Nielsen-Bjerke, and Corey Beck from the county of Grande Prairie. They are joining us here in Edmonton for the Rural Municipalities of Alberta conference. I had the pleasure of meeting with them earlier today, and I now ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you my friend Michelle Eldjarnson. She may not quite have arrived yet. They're en route here. She works tirelessly to support our community and surrounding area. Her concentration is in the chamber membership and supporting those members. She's been instrumental in getting the Chestermere, Langdon, and Strathmore chambers to collaborate on events, and on top of that, she is a full-time realtor. Her focus has also been involved in the business series in Chestermere and Langdon and Strathmore, so this is a person who really, really works hard to bring her community together. She's also a director on the political action standing committee with the Calgary east real estate board and recently travelled to Ottawa to present on behalf of the Bow River district, which includes Chestermere, and lobby on behalf of homeowners. It's such a privilege to speak about her. If you're here, Michelle, if you could rise, and if we could please give her the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today is national child day, so I rise to introduce to you and through you some very special guests. They are winners of Alberta's Great Kids awards here with their families, and they joined me in the cabinet room earlier, where we held our very own cabinet meeting together and discussed some of the issues that mattered to them. If they could please stand as I call their names. Quinlan Grandbois is here with his family: Corine, Oree, and Shirley; Marigold Mioc is here with her mom, Lily, and with Moses; Maddie Bosgra is here with her mom, Leah; Izabelle Gaskarth is here with her dad, Dean, and Liam; Jadah Sparklingeyes and her family: Chantel, Pierre, Jenay, and Jory; and Brady Mishio and his dad, Terry. Hi, guys. These great kids are already leaders in their parts of Alberta. They've overcome great challenges early in their lives, and they've inspired and helped many others around them and demonstrated to me once again today just how bright the future of our province is. I want to thank them for coming from all over Alberta to be here today for our cabinet meeting, and I want to invite them and their families to please receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is indeed my honour today to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House some very special guests of mine in the House. First of all, my daughter, Jodie Johnson. Without her, I probably wouldn't have been elected three times to this House. She helped me very much through all my campaigns and took time off work to work in my campaign office even. If she could stand. Also my son-in-law, Don Johnson. He's been there all along and helping, too, but the best thing those two have done for me has been giving me my two precious things in life, my granddaughters, Tory and Sydney Johnson. I'm really glad to have them in the House today. Most special is my wife, Sherry. As of today it's been 42 years we've been married. It's our anniversary. Thank you. She's been through a lot with me over 42 years and is still here. Please give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a group of advocates with Diabetes Canada. As my colleagues are probably well aware, November is Diabetes Awareness Month, which is a time to focus attention on advocacy for people living with diabetes, of course, prevention, research, and a cure. The support of dedicated volunteers like the guests who are in our gallery today help make life better for people who are living with diabetes. I ask that as I say their names, they rise. They are Kate, Bridget, Murray, Melanie, Doug, Deanna, Christine, Randeep, Maureen, Cali, Dawn, Cory, Nicole, and Louise. Colleagues, please join me in extending the warm welcome to these guests.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly members of the Strathcona County Fire Fighters Union. It is especially an honour today after knowing that Strathcona county has been dealing with the aftereffects of the explosion. There is no one, I believe, that could protect our community better than the folks up there. I don't think I see all of them, but I'll introduce the ones here because I consider them friends and I

consider them folks that have worked with us on things that are important to them. It's a pleasure to introduce President Andrew Spence and Brian Sturm. Those are the well-dressed gentlemen up there that protect the great community of Strathcona county. I just want them to get the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests from Westerner Park in Red Deer. Bradley Williams has served on the board at Westerner Park for the past seven years and was most recently board vice-chair. In September he was asked to step in as CEO until a permanent replacement is found. Kim Mechefske has worked at Westerner Park since 1996, and she is the current concessions and beverage and suite operations manager, a position she's held for the past 10 years. I ask Bradley and Kim to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you three Medicine Hatters. Now, these three people are incredible problem solvers, very hard workers, and great customer service people, and I know this because they were friends and colleagues of mine during my real estate career. When I call their names, if I could ask them to stand. I would first like to introduce the Medicine Hat Real Estate Board president, Tim Seitz. Secondly, I'd like to introduce a past president and our current PAC representative, Jeff Lanigan, and thirdly, another past president and our current Alberta Real Estate director, Devon Felesky. Of course, these three are here to talk to government and talk to opposition about pressing issues in the real estate industry. I ask the three to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce Valerie Keefe. Some of you who were here yesterday afternoon recall that I introduced her then, but I want her to be introduced to the entire House. If she would stand. Valerie is an active advocate for trans people in Alberta. She's here today as part of the day of remembrance for trans people. I would like to point out that she was the president of the NDP at Grant MacEwan University and is no longer with the NDP and is working with the Freedom Conservative Party, advocating libertarian principles in support of all people and trans people. I ask that the members give Valerie the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Drysdale: Madam Speaker, I'd just recognize two more special guests in the gallery from the city of Grande Prairie, councillor Jackie Clayton and councillor Wade Pilat. I assume that they're here to take in the RMA convention. I see them sitting there. I just wish that you'd give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, prior to the start of Members' Statements I would like to inform hon. members about further revisions to both the Oral Question Period and Members'

Statements rotations. Yesterday, November 19, the Speaker's office received a signed House leaders' agreement. The agreement has been reviewed, and it raises no concerns.

The changes to the Oral Question Period rotation indicated in the agreement are as follows. The Member for Calgary-East may ask question 7 on days 3 and 7 of the eight-day rotation. These questions were previously allotted to the Official Opposition. The Official Opposition now receives question 10 on days 3 and 7. These questions were previously allotted to private members from the government caucus.

Concerning the Members' Statements rotation, the House leaders' agreement provides that the Member for Calgary-East receives one member's statement every three weeks on a Thursday, starting on November 29, 2018.

The Speaker's office sent out a memorandum concerning the changes to both rotations earlier today. Members can find on their desks copies of the Oral Question Period rotation and the projected sitting days calendar, which contains the Members' Statements rotation, among other things. These new rotations will take effect today. I will table the House leaders' agreement under the appropriate item of business later in the Routine. I would also note that the Assembly is on day 1 of the Oral Question Period rotation and week 1 of the Members' Statements rotation.

Members' Statements

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Canadian Finals Rodeo

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On January 16 of this year it was announced that for the first time in its 44-year history the Canadian Finals Rodeo would no longer be held in Edmonton. It was travelling to a new city and venue. It would be calling Westerner Park in Red Deer its new home.

It was an exciting announcement for our city, but there was little time to celebrate. There were just nine short months to plan and prepare for the 45th year of the CFR. In nine months what our city accomplished is nothing short of incredible. Our community pulled together: 247 volunteers donated over 3,000 hours of their time and their blood, sweat, and tears and showed the entire country what makes Red Deer such an amazing city.

Over 43,000 people attended CFR 45 during its six-day run. It is estimated that over \$20 million was injected into our economy. Over \$45,000 was raised for local charities. The first-ever junior finals rodeo Rising Stars event awarded \$24,000 in scholarships to our up-and-coming young athletes. The achievement of CFR 45 is just confirmation of the incredible spirit of our community.

I would like to thank Westerner Park and all of their staff and volunteers, whose passion and planning brought the CFR to Red Deer and whose dedication and hard work has made CFR 45 such a huge success. I would like to thank our government, especially Culture and Tourism, for their \$250,000 grant, that we invested into the CFR through the major fairs program. I would also like to thank all of the businesses and organizations that stepped up and sponsored CFR 45 and its events.

It is a testament to our community that CFR 45 was such a huge success. I'm looking forward to CFR 46. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Humans Helping Humans Foundation in Drayton Valley

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. One of the joys of living in Alberta is realizing that as a result of its pioneer history and its entrepreneurial spirit we are a province of can-do people. A perfect example of this is the work of Humans Helping Humans in Drayton Valley. Local businessman Hack Hamdon believed that there was a need for affordable housing in Drayton Valley. Too many low- and middle-income families struggled to find appropriate and affordable housing within the community, so Hack and other residents started up Humans Helping Humans.

In 2008, after much planning, fundraising, and organizing, Humans Helping Humans had raised more than \$215,000 and saw their first duplex project go to two deserving families. Since then, projects have been completed in 2010, 2012, and 2015, and on October 4, 2018, I had the privilege of watching two more families take ownership of the latest two housing units. Amidst the joy of seeing two families receive a hand up was the satisfaction of knowing that the funding and building of every one of these houses of hope was done through the generosity and hard work of the local community.

1:50

A portion of the funds to build these houses of hope has come through the fundraising efforts of local celebrities, who practise for many months to compete in a dance competition called Shakin 'n Drayton. Now, on November 24 the community of Drayton Valley will once again gather to watch some amazing dancing that is in reality an exercise of community love and generosity. This year the tickets to this event sold out in less than 38 hours. Now, if you missed out on tickets but still want to help this worthy cause, I would encourage you all to go visit Hack Hamdon and the other board members, and I am sure they would willingly accept any and all donations.

Oral Question Period

The Deputy Speaker: First main question. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Oil Price Differentials

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Albertans understand that our province is being devastated by a massive underselling of our greatest asset, our oil, at a \$45-a-barrel discount. Yesterday I called on Alberta's oil producers to step up to the plate voluntarily to reduce the inventories and reduce the price differential by cutting production of Alberta oil by some 250,000 barrels per day. Will the Premier join with me in calling on those companies to lead voluntarily with action?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. In fact, it turns out we've already been on this issue. As I believe the member opposite is aware, we have appointed envoys to go and meet with leaders in our energy industry to address this issue because we understand it's fundamentally important. The idea of bringing them into a room and then having them agree to voluntarily do it: well, that's illegal. That's collusion. One of the things that's really important for us to do, therefore, is to work with them in the way that our government is, and we are hopeful that we will find a solution on behalf of all Albertans.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Madam Speaker, when I asked that very serious question, the Premier snickered. She laughed. I don't understand why this is a laughing matter, that our economy is losing tens of billions of dollars of value a year, the Alberta treasury \$5 billion a year. The question was a very straightforward one that was put to me by a number of leaders in the energy sector over the past few days. Why won't the government call on companies voluntarily, without collusion, to reduce production by just about 5 per cent, that would help to reduce the price differential massively, by about 50 per cent?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order noted.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think the member opposite should be reminded that, in fact, our government takes this matter very, very seriously, and I can't accept his characterization that somehow we are not. In fact, we have been focused on very little but this issue. I have met with energy industry leaders myself, and I have been gathering advice from all quarters. We are working on this front both in terms of the short term, the medium term, and the long term to increase takeaway capacity and also to address matters in a very urgent basis, and we will continue that work.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. One of the envoys appointed by the Premier yesterday, her former chief of staff Mr. Topp, has compared Alberta oil to, quote, ethical land mines. He's called for us to produce a great deal less hydrocarbon energy, pledged to get fossil fuel cars out of Canada's cities, and has a long track record of attacking Alberta's oil industry. Doesn't this ring like the appointment of Tzaporah Berman to co-chair the NDP's advisory group on the oil sands? Why should we be taking advice from somebody who wants to damage the industry?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Let me begin by saying that what I won't do is take advice from someone who spent 10 years in Ottawa and actually managed to make the problem worse and, certainly, to not fix the problem. What I will say is that Mr. Topp worked closely with energy leaders to put together the climate leadership plan and to put together the consensus from energy leaders with respect to that plan. He also worked closely with them with respect to our royalty review, a review that produced a system that the energy leaders across the sector were in favour of. So I think he has a very good record.

The Deputy Speaker: Second main question. The hon. leader.

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, the NDP is repeating the same mistake they did in the appointment of Tzaporah Berman.

Pipeline Development

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, we would not be in this situation if the federal government had not vetoed the construction of the Northern Gateway pipeline, that had been approved by the last government. Yesterday former Liberal MP Martha Hall Findlay, now an Albertan, said: I think one of the biggest mistakes the federal government has made in Canadian history was to say no to Northern Gateway; that will prove to have been disastrous. Does

the Premier agree that the decision to veto Northern Gateway was a disastrous mistake?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. What I know as the Premier of this province is that successive federal governments in Ottawa, a federal government of which the member opposite was a part and the current federal government, have failed to get this right and have failed to get a pipeline built to tidewater in almost 70 years. It is shocking. As Albertans we are all frustrated, and we need to move forward. We need to get progress. We need to get a pipeline to tidewater. We are working on all fronts. With respect to the differential we are working with respect to medium-term takeaway capacity. We are working for the long-term solutions, getting a pipeline, and upgrading our . . .

Mr. Kenney: Well, Madam Speaker, that takes a lot of chutzpah, for this Premier to criticize her close friend and ally Justin Trudeau for vetoing Northern Gateway at her request. In April of 2015 the Premier said, quote, Northern Gateway is not the right decision. She admitted in this place last May that she asked the federal government for only one pipeline to the west coast. Why did the Premier make this historic and disastrous mistake of advising the federal government to cancel the approved Northern Gateway pipeline?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you again, Madam Speaker. First of all, the historic and disastrous mistake was the way Northern Gateway was managed by the former Conservative government, of which the member opposite was a part. Take some responsibility. Also, he should stop making things up because I certainly did not ever make any such request to the Prime Minister, and the member opposite needs to stop saying things that are not true.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, it's not just a quote attributed by the *Calgary Herald*; it's on video, where the Premier said, at an editorial board meeting of the *Calgary Herald* in front of a dozen journalists and a live video camera, that Gateway is "not the right decision." It was in this Chamber on May 1 that she said: what we did was talk to the federal government about getting a pipeline to tidewater; we said that we needed one of those pipelines to go west. This Premier, that party opposed Northern Gateway. Why don't they stand up and take responsibility for that historic error?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. At no time did this Premier or anybody in this government ask the federal government to cancel Northern Gateway. Let me be absolutely clear with respect to that issue. Moreover, we have done nothing but fight to get Trans Mountain built from the very beginning up till now, and until it is actually built, unlike the members opposite, who want to dine out on cheering for failure, we are focused on building support from coast to coast to coast. For the Trans Mountain pipeline we've gone from 4 in 10 to 7 in 10 Canadians supporting it, and we will get it done.

The Deputy Speaker: Third main question, hon. leader.

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, not only did this government cheer for the failure of Northern Gateway, not only did they not raise a

peep of protest following its cancellation by their ally Justin Trudeau, but they were actively opposed to the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline. When asked on live radio if the Premier supported the construction of Keystone, she said no. Will the Premier admit that it was a terrible mistake for her and her party to oppose the Keystone XL pipeline?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

2:00

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In fact, I and my party and our Minister of Energy committed 50,000 barrels to the Keystone pipeline to get it over the finish line. We have in fact worked very closely with the proponents of the Keystone pipeline to get that pipeline built. We have also supported line 3. Just yesterday we heard that line 3 has passed significant bureaucratic hurdles in the U.S., in part because of the incredible representations made by our minister of environment to those decision-makers on behalf of line 3. We are fighting for pipelines each and every day, unlike the members opposite.

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, the government's budget was predicated on the construction of at least two pipelines. We've now had the suspension of Trans Mountain after multiple victory laps by the NDP government. We've had the suspension of Keystone XL, the killing of Energy East, the vetoing of Northern Gateway. What are the consequences of these decisions on the fiscal plan of the government?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We know that in the short term the delays of these two pipelines, TMX and Keystone, will have consequences. So far we are on track with respect to our current budget projections, and we will provide more information as we receive it. But here's the thing: what we do know is that we will not give a \$700 million tax cut to the top 1 per cent. We will not lay off 4,000 teachers. We will not lay off 4,000 nurses. We will not, quote, make it hurt, end quote, for Albertans.

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, the NDP . . .

Mr. Hanson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order noted.
Go ahead, hon. leader.

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, the NDP is making it hurt for Albertans. [interjections] They're laughing about 148,000 unemployed Albertans, about six straight months of higher unemployment, about the highest unemployment in Canada outside of Atlantic Canada. Now they're planning for a 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax to make it even worse. How do they propose to balance the budget five years from now without the 67 per cent increase in the carbon tax that they banked on?

Ms Notley: Again, Madam Speaker, I've answered that question a number of times. We have indicated that our path to balance does not currently require or depend upon an increase in carbon pricing as per the federal plan because we are waiting for the Trans Mountain pipeline to get shovels in the ground. But let me be very clear. The member opposite and one of his MLAs said: it's going to hurt. That is their plan. Rather than taking shots over here at difficult situations that we're all trying to manage, why won't they come clean with what their plan is?

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

Assisted Dying

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Medical assistance in dying is a serious issue and unimaginably stressful for patients and their families. The issue, albeit new and evolving in Alberta, should have garnered the utmost attention of the minister to make sure that patients and Albertans were not falling through the cracks. To the Minister of Health: what steps did you take during the implementation of medical assistance in dying to ensure timely access to services?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and certainly thank you to the member for the question. This is an incredibly important and personal topic for, arguably, every Albertan in some way. We have been following the federal legislation and making sure that we roll out the right to choose medical assistance in death throughout our province. I'm proud of the kinds of national recognition we've received, but certainly there is more work to be done because we know that there are some people who have found it difficult to access that choice, and that is certainly not acceptable.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, you are aware that at least two Albertans over two years ago were faced with difficulties in accessing medical assistance in dying. To the same minister: why didn't you act when you were first made aware of the problem, and why didn't you address these issues until they became public?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, the federal legislation just came into effect slightly over two years ago, and in the months following that, there certainly were some situations that were very difficult for families. I want to thank Doreen Nowicki's family for sitting down and meeting with me to discuss what they experienced, particularly the assessment that happened outside of hospital and how difficult that was for them. I can imagine that any other family could imagine how difficult that would be for their loved ones. What we have done is that we've addressed those concerns, and we've made sure that the new model continues to work in a way that honours and respects patients and their choices.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Medical assistance in dying presents an ethical dilemma for some health service providers, and we should respect and accommodate those beliefs. However, the first concern must always be for the wishes and well-being of the patient. Respectfully, Minister, your actions have demonstrated that in these particular cases patients, Albertans, seem to be an afterthought. To the same minister: what is your plan, going forward, to ensure that Albertans aren't forced onto the street to access a legal medical service, and can you ensure that your ministry is patient focused and not politically focused?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Again, I want to say that the way that Mrs. Nowicki was treated, in my

opinion and I think in the opinion of all, is unacceptable. That is not something that we would want for anyone that we love or for ourselves. Every patient in Alberta deserves to access a high level of dignified, compassionate care no matter where they are and what health facility they might be in.

I've asked Covenant Health to update their policies to reflect the amended practice. Certainly, this fiscal year nobody has had to be removed for an assessment to be done. I've asked them to make sure that they update their policy to reflect that that will be the expectation moving forward. If it doesn't do so, I will act myself, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, just a reminder that there will be no preambles on supplementaries.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Grande Prairie Regional Hospital Construction

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Like many Albertans, the people of Grande Prairie have been working hard, raising families, and paying their fair share of taxes. I was pleased to hear that recently a new construction manager was selected for the Grande Prairie regional hospital. Can the minister update us on when the work will resume on-site and provide us with a revised completion date?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We do now have a construction manager. We are pleased to announce that Clark Builders is taking over construction management on the Grande Prairie hospital. Very happy to see that. They're going to begin mobilizing the site right away. Full construction activity is going to ramp up in the new year. Clark's first order of business is to put a construction schedule together, and once that is in place, they will begin looking at the subcontractors that they will take to the site.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hard-working men and women are the backbone of our economy. How are we ensuring that the subtrades who are working on the site have an opportunity to continue working on this project?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, as I said before, construction activity is going to ramp up in the new year, and we hope to have nearly 400 construction workers on the site. I had a chance to touch base with the president of Clark Builders. They have just a terrific reputation. We had a conversation about making sure that we stayed in the loop as per what was happening down at the site. Our intention is to work closely with Clark Builders to make sure that there are lots of opportunities for the existing trades to determine if they would like to bid on a new contract on this project, and we welcome the local subcontractors in that effort.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This project has been plagued with issues in the past. Can the minister tell us what the budget is for the project and what she is doing to ensure that there is cost certainty on this project?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The existing capital plan for this hospital has a budget of \$763 million. The project scope was previously fixed in December 2016. So \$763 million: it's going to remain at that number. The new construction management fee falls well within that budget amount. We are very confident in our construction manager and in our ability to get this hospital done for the good people of Grande Prairie, some of whom I see up in the gallery. I had the pleasure of chatting with them today about it.

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

Health Care Budget

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Canadian Institute for Health Information today released a report stating that Alberta is the highest spending jurisdiction per capita on health care in Canada. In fact, if we were to spend just the Canadian average on health care, we would save over \$3 billion annually. That totals nearly half of the government's deficit. To the Minister of Health: why does Alberta have the most expensive health care system in Canada?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:10

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the member for the thoughtful and important question. Certainly, this is a complex matter and one that can't be addressed overnight. There were many years where the now Official Opposition had budget increases in excess of 6 per cent, and then in later years they'd fire a bunch of staff, and then they'd do another 6 per cent increase the year after that. Instead, what we've done on this side of the House is that we've worked to provide stability and reasonable growth. The same report talked about Alberta's increase being only 2.2 per cent this last year. We're getting to a rate of growth that's far more sustainable than we saw under the former government, and we're focused on the front lines and making sure patient care is the driver.

Dr. Swann: Madam Speaker, again to the minister: what areas of efficiency does she see in reducing this, I would say, unprecedented budget, which continues to be over?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. There are three areas in the budget where we see that the pie charts under former governments grew dramatically, and we tried to make sure we addressed that and had more stable growth. Those were physician compensation, pharmaceutical costs, and acute-care operations. We've done a lot of work to make sure that we focus our acute care around patients instead of blowing up hospitals, like we saw under the Official Opposition when they were in government in the '90s. We've made sure that we're bulk buying and using the lowest cost but highest efficacy of pharmaceuticals, and we sat down with physicians and renegotiated their compensation.

Dr. Swann: Will the minister commit to an audit of the Alberta health system and look for other areas of efficiency? Yes or no?

Ms Hoffman: Madam Speaker, I'm very proud of the fact that we have an extensive audit team within the GOA as well as with the Auditor General. We do regular system audits in specific areas within the system. I believe that the Auditor General and Public Accounts met just this morning to discuss Health. I think that that

is one of the ways that we have really good opportunities to focus on policy outcomes and costs.

One of the other areas where we spend more than in neighbouring provinces is on seniors' drug coverage. The Official Opposition talks about: well, we could spend the same as B.C. and get better outcomes. Well, B.C. seniors pay far more for their drugs, Madam Speaker. I don't want that to be the outcome for Albertans, to raise their drug costs.

Energy Policies and Social Licence

Mr. Dreeshen: Madam Speaker, during question period on November 7, in response to my good friend from Calgary-Foothills' question on the NDP's social licence, the environment minister's response was: let's talk about something real. She continued this government's position that increasing taxes and regulatory burden will somehow get pipelines built. Was the minister of environment, from her time as a Greenpeace activist, fully aware of this fictitious social licence value that the NDP has been peddling to Albertans for the last three and a half years?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Well, I'm not sure that I'm going to take direction from someone who spent 10 months of his life campaigning for a guy who thinks that climate change is a hoax perpetrated by the Chinese, in terms of direction on how to make climate policy. What we have done is that we're reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We have done so by 11 megatonnes. Already we have reinvested \$1.4 billion in innovation projects. There's much more to talk about as we've also made sure that we have the fastest growing economy in Canada.

Mr. Dreeshen: Madam Speaker, let's bring this a little bit closer to home. Given that the Premier and the minister of environment have stood outside this very building protesting pipelines and now given that the Premier appoints Brian Topp, a failed federal NDP leadership candidate who also campaigned against pipelines, to be the NDP's relief pitcher on the oil price differential crisis caused by their desire for a pipeline shortage, why is the NDP trying to redefine their record as proponents of pipelines when for so long they were protesters of pipelines?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. That statement is false. It is directly false.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Phillips: I would appreciate it if the member would cease in misleading the House on anything that I have or have not done, Madam Speaker. It is false. That's the first thing.

The second thing here, Madam Speaker, is that we have brought in a climate leadership plan, yes. We have done so at the same time as the economy has grown the fastest in Canada. We have done so in a way that makes sure that a climate plan is not imposed on us by Ottawa. If we want to talk about private citizens, I have two words: John Carpay. Is that guy still on your team?

Mr. Dreeshen: Madam Speaker, the Premier, the minister of the environment, and Brian Topp have all opposed Alberta oil. Given that the NDP's social licence has done nothing to get pipelines built, given that the Deputy Minister of Energy at the Resource Stewardship Committee said that the social licence has no value, and given that pipeline protestors other than those sitting in this

Assembly continue to oppose pipelines, can the government explain why they continue to push their failed social licence ideas on Albertans rather than admitting it hasn't worked in getting pipelines built?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. If we want to take a trip down memory lane, perhaps 10 months of this member's life spent campaigning to grab us all by the steel tariff could be something that we talk about. But you know what? We've cut small business taxes by a third; we have exempted small and medium-sized oil and gas companies until 2023, something that Justin Trudeau has not committed to doing; and we've provided \$2 billion in carbon offsets to companies investing in methane. All of those investments would be cancelled if the folks across the way had their way.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin.

Energy Advisory Group Appointments

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The price differential for Alberta oil has now reached crisis proportions. We're losing almost \$100 million a day because we're forced to sell at such a high discount. That's almost \$25 per Albertan per day. This is a result of failed NDP policy. This isn't just a Fort McMurray problem or an Alberta problem; it's a Canadian crisis. I truly question why there are no industry representatives on this advisory panel. At this critical time why did the Premier appoint Brian Topp, someone who spent years fighting against Alberta oil and gas jobs, to this important panel?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd be happy to talk about the fact that our Premier and our government have done more to secure market access and a pipeline to tidewater than the previous federal Conservative government and the previous PC governments in the last 20 years. In fact, the Leader of the Official Opposition was a cabinet minister for Canada and failed to get a pipeline to tidewater. Our government has done more advocating on behalf of our energy sector, and we are closer and closer to getting that pipeline built. We will not quit until it's built.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that Tzeporah Berman previously advocated for shutting down the oil sands and given that she referred to my home as Mordor and given that she pocketed tens of thousands of our tax dollars advising the NDP government on oil sands and given that directly after ending this gig she went on to fight against the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project and given that it's the lack of pipelines to tidewater that's the major cause of the extreme price differential, to the Premier: will you admit that her appointment was wrong?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd love to ask the hon. member if she'd admit that her leader failed to get any pipeline to tidewater when he spent 10 years in Ottawa. Our government will continue to work toward market access, pipelines, quite frankly, in all directions. We committed 50,000 barrels per day for the Keystone XL pipeline. We were very disappointed to hear that that has been delayed, but we will continue to advocate for market

access. Our Premier has taken concrete steps to address the immediate differential crisis but also the medium term and the long term. We will see it built.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that Brian Topp compared Canadian ethical oil to land mines and given that he called to ban fossil-fuelled cars in cities and given that he said that Canada should, and I quote, produce a great deal less hydrocarbon energy and given that he was the one that developed the failed carbon tax as social licence to get . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have a question, hon. member?

Ms Goodridge: . . . pipelines built, does the NDP government honestly believe that Topp will be any different than Berman?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Again, you know, I'll talk a little bit about the work that our Premier and our government has done not only on the Trans Mountain pipeline but also working with the energy sector to diversify within our industry. In fact, earlier today the Premier talked about how we are going to be upgrading more of our petrochemicals here in Alberta. We're following on the legacy of Peter Lougheed and showing true leadership on this file as opposed to the Official Opposition that doesn't believe in diversifying our economy nor supporting the very energy leaders that are the backbone of this country.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

2:20

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Earlier today the University of Calgary released a research paper that found the NDP's current fiscal path forward is unsustainable. The Finance minister's talk of balancing his budget is just inaccurate. Compounding Alberta's fiscal crisis are the worst oil prices for Alberta's oil, Canada's highest per capita health care costs for 2018, and his ever-skyrocketing debt costs. To the Finance minister: what is your government doing to avert this current fiscal crisis?

Mr. Ceci: Madam Speaker, of course, we appreciate the work of Professor Tombe. These projections, though, do not take into account the fact that we have found savings and will continue to find savings that clean up government, that we have economic indicators that are changing over time like the GDP, oil prices, and manufacturing levels, and the fact that we have cut the deficit already by \$3 billion. Those things also have to go into projections. We're on to balance the budget by 2023.

Mr. Barnes: Madam Speaker, given that if this government stays the course, Alberta's debt will reach 50 per cent of GDP, higher than any time in our history, higher still than in the 1930s, when the province partially defaulted on its debt obligations, again to the Finance minister: will you commit to helping Alberta families and commit to practical solutions like cutting red tape, supporting free enterprise, and supporting Alberta communities?

Mr. Ceci: You know, Madam Speaker, we have already done all sorts of things. We have cancelled golf club memberships that the previous government left in place for agencies, boards, and commissions. We got rid of the private jet that they used to go

around the province in. In fact, Professor Tombe himself admits that this report is projections. They're not predictions. They're not definitive predictions of where we will go. We will balance by 2023.

Mr. Barnes: Madam Speaker, given that according to economists at the University of Calgary this government's fiscal plan will result in debt service costs of \$22 billion a year by 2040, making this government's department of debt interest the second-largest department by spending, is the Finance minister aware that this is simply unsustainable and will jeopardize every single important priority of Alberta families, even education and health care?

Mr. Ceci: Madam Speaker, I stand corrected. It wasn't a jet; it was an air force they had.

Professor Tombe also acknowledges, and that side doesn't, that we have the best balance sheet of any province, Madam Speaker. In fact, when we balance in 2023, we will still have the lowest net debt to GDP in the country. Professor Tombe acknowledges that. Why can't they?

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

Labour Legislation

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before I was elected, I was very active in the fight for workers' rights here in Alberta. I've stood shoulder to shoulder with my sisters and brothers in the labour movement, who for years asked for improvements to our province's labour laws only to be met with silence from the former Conservative governments. To the Minister of Labour: what are you doing to ensure that workers' voices are heard and respected?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Our government has the backs of workers, and we are fighting for the things that matter to them. When we came into office, we inherited labour laws that were decades out of date. Workers in Alberta were denied the same rights and protections that workers across Canada were benefiting from, and it wasn't right. That's why we took action. Our changes now mean safer jobs. They mean a WCB system that will be easier to navigate and a labour relations system that works for everyone. Most importantly, it means increased rights for all working people, not just benefits for those at the top.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that before the changes to Alberta's out-of-date labour laws it often meant that workers fell further and further behind while those at the top in Alberta got further and further ahead, again to the Labour minister: what are you doing to ensure that workers have labour laws that work for them, not against them?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very proud of the work that we've done to ensure that working people in our province finally have a voice at the table. I'd like to thank the member asking the question for the work he has done to advocate for workers' rights.

We know the Conservative plan for workers, Madam Speaker. We've seen it in action for decades. Working folks saw their contracts ripped up, their pensions attacked, their rights trampled so that someone could take a better vacation or buy a second home.

Now the Conservatives are planning to double down on these failed policies and make things even harder and hurt families. I will not allow that to happen, and I also think we should be reviewing laws earlier than every 40 years.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that the past Conservative governments have tried to strip workers of their rights, again to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure workers' rights are not only respected but strengthened?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Unlike the Conservatives, on this side of the House we do not think that workers, collective bargaining, and unions are bad words or words that need to be whispered in the tone of Voldemort. No. On this side of the House we're on the side of everyday working people. I'm going to keep fighting for the things that matter to them. The Conservatives have been very clear. They want to roll back workers' rights, they want to leave families in the lurch, and they want to fire 4,000 teachers and nurses just so they can give the top 1 per cent a \$700 million tax giveaway. Albertans have already seen that movie, and it's not pretty.

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

Postsecondary Sexual Abuse and Assault Policies

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Alberta Party caucus believes in school of choice and reasonable accommodations for the individual beliefs of teachers and students. However, we also see the need for standards that ensure that all students have the access and the support they need such as this government's approach to GSAs. The Minister of Education may want to share that approach with the Minister of Advanced Education, however, because postsecondary students are asking for something similar. To the Minister of Advanced Education. Students have been asking that postsecondary institutions be required to have a stand-alone sexual assault policy. Why haven't you made this change?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, we've been working with our institutions to make sure that every institution has a sexual harassment and sexual violence policy in place. I'm pleased to report that most of them do. We still have two policies outstanding, and we are working with those institutions to make sure that they get those done as quickly as possible. It was my pleasure to meet with the students of ASEC earlier this week to discuss their concerns around sexual violence prevention policies on campus. I assured them that I'm working with our partners in the postsecondary institutions to make sure that their policies meet best practices.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that sexual assault and sexual misconduct can completely derail the opportunity for a survivor to get an education and given that recovering from the trauma of sexual abuse or sexual assault is a lifelong process, to the same minister: what protections and supports are in place across all postsecondary institutions to ensure that survivors of sexual assault or abuse have the support and flexibility to complete their programs?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, our government has committed a significant number of dollars to mental health supports. In discussions with a number of the institutions some of those institutions have used those mental health support dollars to support sexual violence survivors in dealing with the issues that have been created by their experiences. Of course, we've continued to encourage all universities and colleges to have the resources available to their students to deal with these issues when they arise. What won't help is millions of . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Mental health issues arising from an assault can be quite isolating, and given that a student's peers may be able to help in a way others can't and given that we should be supporting student-led mental health initiatives, to the same minister: will you require that Alberta postsecondary institutions provide a portion of their mental health funding for programs that are designed and supported in partnership with students' associations?

Mr. Schmidt: Madam Speaker, I had the chance to meet with the student representatives of ASEC earlier this week to discuss that exact matter, and what I assured them is that as we review the mental health programs that have been instituted with the money that we provided in our budget a couple of years ago, we would ensure that the students' voices are heard in the development and implementation of those programs. That work is ongoing with our universities and colleges all across the province. It's important to know that our government has students' backs in this matter. We want their voices to be heard, and we want the mental health supports to meet the needs of students. We're working very hard to make sure that . . .

School Bus Driver Training

Mr. Cooper: Alberta school bus drivers transport our most precious resource. School boards are currently required to provide extensive driver training, and as a result there are very few traffic incidents caused by school buses. Despite this strong safety record the Transportation minister has ruled that school boards may no longer be able to provide such training and that this training must be provided by a third party at the cost of over \$1,500. Why are school boards being subject to this massive change that will not make school buses, their drivers, and, more importantly, our children any safer?

2:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Well, our government has introduced a number of measures to improve safety on our highways, including mandatory entry-level training for people who seek a class 1 or class 2 driver's licence, and we worked closely with stakeholders, including school boards. More recently they've raised some concerns with respect to that, and we're in discussions with the school boards. I'm hopeful that we can get a resolution satisfactory to them. But the important thing that I want to emphasize is that our government has taken very clear and positive steps to improve the safety of everyone travelling on our highways, including school children.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, given that our children's safety is paramount yet the province of Ontario currently exempts school bus

drivers from its mandatory entry-level training requirements for commercial drivers and given that the Alberta School Boards Association is seeking a similar exemption, will the minister commit to hearing out our school transportation professionals before imposing this untested and expensive training program on our schools that, in fact, is highly unlikely to actually increase safety?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Of course, we're willing to talk to our partners, to school districts, and to other stakeholders as well. But I hardly understand how exempting school boards from the new, more rigorous standards for training actually improves safety for children. Perhaps the member could enlighten us.

Mr. Cooper: Well, Madam Speaker, there are plenty of ways to improve safety for our children and given that when riding the school bus the most dangerous occurrence for students is when impatient drivers choose to ignore flashing lights or stop arms and impatient drivers pass buses illegally – this happens so commonly that bus drivers call it a flyby . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, do you have a question?

Mr. Cooper: . . . and given that in one jurisdiction in northern Alberta they recorded a hundred incidents of flybys, to the Minister of Transportation: will you consider increasing . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you're out of time.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I think I got the gist of it here, Madam Speaker. The hon. member uses a lot of statistics and examples from Ontario. But I can tell him that we thoroughly agree with him, as do school jurisdictions and all safety organizations, that these flybys, as he calls them, are a very, very serious problem, and we enforce that most rigorously. I can tell him that that's something that we're going to continue to make sure that we monitor to make sure that our children are as safe as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Grande Prairie Regional Hospital Construction (continued)

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Unfortunately, the Member for West Yellowhead stole my question about the Grande Prairie hospital, but I thank the minister for the information anyway. I will be able to share that with my residents. But I didn't hear the minister say exactly a time frame of when the new hospital will be complete. Could she actually give us that time frame?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the member across the aisle for his advocacy on this. One of the great things about having him as a former colleague and a friend is that we can consider this issue postpartisan and work together to make sure we get that Grande Prairie hospital built, so I thank him for his efforts on this.

Clark Builders is going to have a construction schedule in place, as I said. They hope to begin getting those subs and the sub subs after Christmas, Madam Speaker, and then move ahead as quickly

as possible. So we're pretty excited that we're going to get this project done on time and on budget.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On time and on budget sounds good, but I still don't know the time.

Madam Speaker, given that local contractors are out millions of dollars, you know, after the last general contractor was relieved from the project and that there's no assurance that they will get to go back to work and that the answer given to them was, "We've paid Graham all the money; take Graham to court in order to get your money," well, these small local contractors are on the verge of going under, and I just hope the minister can . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. That is absolutely a concern to all of us. I know that the member and I have had this conversation. I had this conversation with the president of Clark Builders and told them about my concerns. We had the conversation with the folks from Grande Prairie council, of course, who are up in the gallery. These are critical issues that we consider very important. We want to make sure that going forward everybody understands. We've got a lot of folks who have worked on this project in Grande Prairie. We want to make sure that their concerns are addressed.

And I just want to say again that in a fine example of postpartisanship, our ability to work together as a group to make sure that this gets done . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you again, Madam Speaker. The minister quoted a number, and I was a little bit annoyed because I didn't hear it. I thought I heard \$765 million. That's good, but the question is: does that money just include the construction, or does that include all the money to equip the new hospital once the construction is finished?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So \$763 million is the complete budget for the project. If there are any other concerns that Clark has, of course, we will address them as we go through, but we agreed to this budget in 2016 as the budget for the project. Clark has agreed that that is the budget going forward, so we are confident with someone with Clark's reputation. We know that they have an excellent track record of completing complex health care facilities and completing them on time. Of course, the Stanton Territorial hospital renewal project in Yellowknife is a prime example of that, so we're confident that . . .

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

Adoption Regulations

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Last year this House voted unanimously in support of my private member's Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. This bill would allow prospective parents to be able to post profiles online and help them with the enormous backlog of families looking to complete their loving family. The bill has still not been proclaimed. To the minister. I asked you for

an update on these issues on April 10. Have you finished drafting regulations, and if not, why not?

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

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. All children deserve a safe, welcoming, and loving home, and adoptive families play a very critical role in helping to ensure that children in our province get exactly that. We share the member's commitment to ensuring that the adoption process gives both children and parents the best possible outcomes. We're currently consulting with Albertans on next steps, but we need to take the time to get this right.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, I recently received a message from a constituent, and the quote is:

I am wondering when the regulations [for adoption law] will take place as we are quite hopeful that this may give us a chance to finally find a way to adopt a child. [We've] been waiting for over 4 years to be matched.

Four years. To the minister: what do you have to say to these adoptive parents across Alberta who are desperately waiting for the proclamation of this legislation to help them finally complete their families?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Like I said, we want to take the time that we need in order to get these changes right. In order to do that, we're talking to young people, to families, to parents, to organizations and working together to look for improvements. I know the Conservatives have no problems rushing through changes to make life harder for families, but we are not planning to do that.

Mrs. Aheer: Madam Speaker, it's too bad that a partisan attack has to come on a piece of legislation that was actually, you know, passed unanimously in this House. I do believe that the questions that I'm asking are relevant to the fact that this minister has not reported back to me since April of last year when I asked what is happening with the regulations on this legislation so that families can actually go out and adopt and to increase the process to get rid of the backlog. My question is: can the minister please provide the House, then, with the date that you have instructed your department to have . . .

2:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've been talking very closely also to potential adoptive families about it. These are very complex issues, and it's incredibly important for both the children and for those families that we get it right. I know it's strange to hear we're actually taking the time to consult with Albertans rather than just talking to used car salesmen. But, you know, on this side of the House we're really committed to having the backs of those Albertans and fighting for those families and fighting for those children and taking the time to ensure that we invest best in the future for those children.

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

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Ms Payne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Our world has changed since many parts of the current K to 12 curricula were written, with the widespread use of the Internet and smart phones as just one example. We all want our children to succeed both in school and in the modern world. How will the curriculum review ensure that Alberta children graduate with a world-class education and the ability to lead our province and economy into the future?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, we are very proud of the work that we are doing to modernize our curriculum here in the province of Alberta. Some of the subject areas were more than 30 years old, and certainly we wanted to integrate those curricula for different subjects together as well. We've had industry leaders. We've had banks. We've had energy. We've had universities, computer programmers, and the list goes on. Literally, thousands of Albertans have helped to build the curriculum to where it is today.

Ms Payne: Madam Speaker, today's students face an increasingly complex world. In my constituency I regularly hear calls for increased financial literacy, greater understanding of indigenous peoples, and a stronger health component, particularly for physical and mental well-being. How has the curriculum review addressed these critical issues?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, our curriculum for K to 4 right now, which you can see online at Alberta Education, is focusing on basic skills, those foundational skills where kids can be feeling confident about their basic mathematic skills, learning how to read, learning how to do computational thinking as a precursor to coding, all of these things working together based on a platform, a foundation, of confidence. I know as a teacher myself that when a student is confident and they're loved and they have the security from the school, that is a precondition to being successful in school.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Some have been critical of the curriculum review, including saying that they would throw out all of this work. What does the minister say to that?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, we have now had consultation and interaction with more than a hundred thousand Albertans, and the conversation that we're having around curriculum is helping to strengthen, quite frankly, our entire school system. Any suggestion that the opposition would take this curriculum and all of this work and put it through the shredder I think is an indication of a basic lack of understanding of all of the work that has gone on and a basic lack of understanding of what Albertans want for a 21st-century education in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before we continue with Members' Statements, I've had a request to briefly return to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the House for allowing me to rise to introduce my guests. It is my personal pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly an outstanding group of small-business people from an industry association I belonged to for 30 years who are dedicated to maintaining high professional standards and providing valuable diligent service to their clients. Here today are constituents of the MLA for Calgary-Bow, Brad Mitchell, the CEO of AREA, and Matthew McMillan, their advocacy adviser, as well as 30 members of the Alberta Real Estate Association. AREA represents over 10,500 realtors from across this province. They're meeting in Edmonton this week for their annual Government Liaison Days conference. AREA is a vital part of Alberta's real estate sector and an advocate for a healthy, transparently regulated market for buyers, sellers, industry members, and all Albertans as well. I'd ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce a number of guests who are here for the tabling of Bill 27, the Joint Governance of Public Sector Pension Plans Act, which I'll do shortly. They are the United Nurses association's president, Heather Smith; the Alberta Federation of Labour's president, Gil McGowan, and secretary-treasurer, Siobhan Vipond; and the Alberta Fire Fighters Association's president, Craig Macdonald. If they can all stand up.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just would like to recognize a number of other people that have worked very hard towards joint governance on pensions for a long time on behalf of their membership. In the interest of time I'll just say their names. If they could rise as I speak their names, please. To cover off the ends here, we have Nancy Furlong, James Niven,* Karen Kuprys, Dave Climenhaga, Dave Cournoyer, Richard West, Elisabeth Ballermann, Janice Kube, Donna Price, Lola Barrett, Mike Parker, Trudy Thompson, Jerry Toews, Donna Farquharson, Chris Gallaway, Elizabeth Johannson, Marle Roberts, Doug Short, D'Arcy Lanovaz, Elliott Davis, and Tom Fuller. Thank you for your work. Please extend the traditional warm welcome.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Transgender Day of Remembrance

Connolly: Madam Speaker, today is the international Transgender Day of Remembrance, a day to honour and remember those who have lost their lives to hatred and transphobia and have been victims of violence, abuse, and discrimination because of their gender identity and expression. As allies we will not waver in our commitment to support safe and inclusive spaces. My heart goes out to every individual who has to hide who they are for fear of discrimination. To the LGBTQ2S-plus community here in Alberta: we will always be here for you, and we will always support you. No

one should live in fear of violence or harassment. No one should be discriminated against, denied basic services, or lose their life because of who they are.

Being an ally takes more than empty platitudes. An ally calls out friends when they spread hatred and fear. Last week John Carpay, a man the Conservative leader compared to Rosa Parks, stood on stage at the Rebel media conference and told the crowd that the pride flag is the exact same as the Nazi flag. When asked to denounce the hate-filled comments of yet another UCP insider, the Leader of the Opposition couldn't seem to run away from his responsibility fast enough. Madam Speaker, the Conservative leader says that he's an ally, but actions speak louder than words.

Today, on Transgender Day of Remembrance, I really hope the Conservative leader takes a moment to reflect on the impact his actions are having and the damage this rhetoric is causing. We will continue to fight for LGBTQ2S-plus rights in our province, our country, and around the world. I'm so proud to be part of a government that has taken historic steps to create a more inclusive and welcoming province, including adding gender identity and gender expression to the Alberta Human Rights Act. We can honour the over 369 lives lost to transphobia this year by taking a stand against violence, harassment, and bullying and keep working towards a safe, inclusive, and welcoming place for all Albertans.

The facts are clear, Madam Speaker. GSAs save lives, LGBTQ rights are human rights, and it's time that the Conservatives got on board.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Humility in Politics

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As many of my fellow members know, after representing the good people of Livingstone-Macleod for two terms, I've chosen not to seek re-election. I want all of my constituents to know that it has been the honour of my lifetime to serve as an MLA. I worked hard to advance the cause of efficient and responsible government.

If my time here has taught me one thing, it's that this institution works best when those entrusted with the awesome responsibility of governing actively seek to remain humble. Humility in government means respecting the voters' wishes and putting the public good ahead of ideological dispositions. A humble government, for example, would not institute the largest tax increase in our province's history without an electoral mandate, without meaningful consultation, and against the wishes of the majority of Albertans. When governments fail to remain humble, they fall, to be replaced by leaders who are willing to listen.

In this regard I'm heartened by the rebirth and rise of the United Conservative movement within our United Conservative Party. Throughout the unity process there were many doubters among the chattering classes, who told us that there were too many hurdles to overcome, yet our movement was able to overcome every challenge for one simple reason: humility. This, more than any other quality, is what has been missing from Alberta politics. With his commitment to servant leadership our leader has demonstrated a deeper understanding of what is necessary to rebuild our province as a beacon of hope and opportunity. He will serve Albertans well.

Next spring I will leave this place as an MLA for the last time. Thanks to the restoration of honest humility and conservative statesmanship within the Conservative movement I will be able to do so with my head held high. I've never been so confident that Alberta's best days are yet to come.

Thank you.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

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

2:50

Rural Crime Strategy

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Last spring I rose in this House to speak on Alberta's rural crime reduction plan. Rural property crime was spiking, and action needed to be taken, so our government listened to the needs of Albertans and in concert with the RCMP came up with a plan. That plan has already reduced rural property crime by 11 per cent. By expanding rural crime reduction units across Alberta, adding Crown prosecutors, adding crime-mapping experts, and providing more civilian support, the new tactics are already starting to make a difference. Our investments are working.

I have seen this first-hand in my own constituency of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. For example, not long ago break-ins were spiralling out of control in Calling Lake. Residents told me heartbreaking stories of having possessions stolen and having their privacy violated. However, a crime reduction unit was able to come to Calling Lake, and in close co-operation with Athabasca RCMP and the local community break-ins have been dramatically reduced.

It's not just my constituency where the strategy is working. The RCMP has attributed the reduction of crime across the province to the strategy. But we know that not every community has seen these reductions yet, and that's why we will keep fighting to make sure that they do.

When the Alberta crime reduction plan was voted on in the spring, I was amazed to see the UCP oppose it. This issue was more important than what side of the House we sit on. It is about making life safer for Albertans. I am grateful for the Minister of Justice's work and to be part of a government committed to reducing rural crime. But there is still much work that needs to be done. We will continue to listen to Albertans, work with law enforcement and with our local community partners, and continue with the strategy that has been proven to work to ensure that Albertans are safer.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Energy Policies

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Recently Alberta's Premier has asked the federal government to buy more railcars to ship oil to market. After years of participating in activities that hindered this very thing, it's odd that only now this government understands how important our energy industry is to this province's financial well-being. For years private energy companies have been attempting to build pipelines but have been prevented by a narrow, ideological mentality that now sees Alberta's oil sands stranded and completely land locked. Now we are in a situation where railcars are the only short-term solution to accomplish what private industry has been trying to do for years to get their product to market.

In recent years we have seen the result of displacing products that cannot be moved by pipeline in favour of petroleum products that can. When you realize that private industry was fully prepared to invest in and build the Trans Mountain pipeline, it becomes crystal clear that the need for government intervention was unnecessary had they simply gotten out of the way of private enterprise.

Another important example of this is the approach being taken with Alberta's coal plants. The early decommissioning of coal plants will cost Albertans billions of dollars and only contribute to an already out-of-control provincial debt, billions that we can only ill afford.

As a Conservative I believe strongly in smaller government, which also includes less government involvement in private industry. As a rule if something is financially viable and worth while, private investors will usually make it happen on their own.

We are now experiencing a situation that this government's ideological beliefs helped create. Well, Madam Speaker, it's only money, taxpayers' money, Albertans' money.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'll try again. I would like to at the appropriate time move the following motion pursuant to Standing Order 42.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately release an updated fiscal projection given that Budget 2018 did not account for the delay in the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion and the Keystone XL pipeline or the significant differential in oil prices that is impacting Alberta jobs and the economy.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 27

Joint Governance of Public Sector Pension Plans Act

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 27, Joint Governance of Public Sector Pension Plans Act.

Today, Madam Speaker, we are joined by a number of labour leaders who have been pushing for this change for decades. For almost 30 years these practical changes have been promised by a series of Tory Finance ministers, never to move forward. I'm proud that we are finally introducing these changes. The proposed legislation would transition the local authorities pension plan, the public services pension plan, and the special forces pension plan to a joint governance structure. This structure will give employees and employers an equal say in how their pension plans are managed. By giving equal voice to employees and employers, pension decisions will no longer happen to the owners of the plan; they will be made by the owners of the plan.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Panda: Madam Speaker, I rise to table five copies of a report prepared by Alex Markowski, energy market analyst, EDC Associates Ltd., at the request of the Independent Power Producers Society of Alberta, that demonstrates that the Balancing Pool was not consistent with the managing of terminating the PPAs in a commercial manner, thus resulting in the loss of almost \$750 million to the Balancing Pool and approximately \$2.9 billion to the electricity generators of this province, further confirming that the NDP government has been manipulating electricity prices.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other tablings?

Hon. members, I have a tabling, five copies of the November 19, 2018, House leaders agreement on Oral Question Period and members' statement rotations.

Point of Order
Offending the Practices of the Assembly
Questions outside Government Responsibility

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of points of order. I believe the first one is for the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have got a matter of two points of order today relating to the same incident but relating under the same section, referring to the Standing Orders of the Alberta Legislative Assembly, section 23(1), that "A member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member . . . introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly."

Now, there are two flowing from this, one of which I have the benefit of very clear precedent from *Erskine May Parliamentary Practice*, 24th edition. The other I would request that your office investigate. I have not had the benefit of finding the specific section that would be considered in violation of "any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly."

During the first set of questions the Leader of the Official Opposition asked the Premier – I do not have the benefit of the Blues, if you'll forgive me – to get oil producers in Alberta to come together to cut production. In my first section of this I do believe that there are established precedents that it is out of order or, in the words of our standing orders, "introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly," that it is, in fact, a violation of the precedents and practices of this Assembly to call for breaking the law.

3:00

Now, the law I refer to is the Competition Act of Canada, sections 45, 46, and 48. I will just briefly read these sections into the record.

45(1) Every person commits an offence who, with a competitor of that person with respect to a product, conspires, agrees or arranges

- (a) to fix, maintain, increase or control the price for the supply of the product;
- (b) to allocate sales, territories, customers or markets for the production or supply of the product; or
- (c) to fix, maintain, control, prevent, lessen or eliminate the production or supply of the product . . .

46(1) Any corporation, wherever incorporated, that carries on business in Canada and that implements, in whole or in part in Canada, a directive, instruction, intimation of policy or other communication to the corporation or any person from a person in a country other than Canada who is in a position to direct or influence the policies of the corporation, which communication is for the purpose of giving effect to a conspiracy, combination, agreement or arrangement entered into outside Canada that, if entered into in Canada, would have been in contravention of section 45.

Then section 48 elaborates on this.

In short, sections 45, 46, and 48 of the Competition Act are quite clear that other than under supply management organized industries it is illegal for any business in Canada to actively collude on price-fixing and production-fixing. It is illegal. I would seek your wisdom, Madam Speaker, in determining if it is in violation of the practices and precedents of this Assembly for a member to actively advocate breaking a major federal statute.

The second part of what I'm referencing here is also under section 23(1) of the standing orders of this Assembly: "introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly." For this I will turn to – forgive my pronunciation.

Mr. Mason: *Erskine May*.

Mr. Fildebrandt: *Erskine May*. I'll have to take it from Obi-Wan here.

Chapter 20(3) under Outline of the Business of the House of Commons, Order of Business:

It is not in order in a question to ask for action to deal with matters under the control of local or other statutory authorities, or of bodies or persons not responsible to the Government such as banks or companies (except where there is a government shareholding), the Stock Exchange, employers' organizations and trades unions; or to ask for action regarding or information about the activities of such persons or bodies which Ministers have no power to perform or obtain. Questions, however, have been asked about information which the Government collects on such bodies.

Now, our government may own a pipeline, but that is federal. Our government does not own these oil companies. Therefore, it is out of order and against the practices and precedents of this House to be asking the government to intervene in private businesses or to be asking questions about interference in such businesses, as outlined in chapter 20(3) of *Erskine May*.

There are very good reasons for these precedents and rulings here. Competition is fundamental to the functioning of any free-enterprise economy. In the absence of socialism or free enterprise we get crony capitalism. Crony capitalism arises when we have private interest at public expense. To have the government actively engaging in price-fixing, which we already see in supply management areas, to see the government actually engage in limiting competition among businesses in Canada is beyond my understanding of how it could be in any alignment with free-enterprise principles.

These are important laws that we have in the Competition Act to prevent exactly this kind of crony capitalism that emerged in the early 20th century. I would ask . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I think you've explained your point of order. We're starting to move into a debate, and that's not the point of a point of order.

Mr. Fildebrandt: These are important laws. I would seek your advisement if it is in contravention of the practices and precedents of this Assembly to advocate breaking the law and, further, to deem if the questions are in order, period, from chapter 20(3) of *Erskine May* relating to questions beyond the scope of the government.

The Deputy Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. There's a lot to possibly be said for that rant, but I don't really know if it's worth this House's time, quite frankly. It's the first time I've ever seen, though, a member rise in this House on a point of order and then outright admit that they can't find anything inside any standing orders along the way that show that they have a point of order and then ask the Speaker to conduct – at one point there it sounded like he wanted you to conduct a criminal investigation, civil investigation; I don't know – some sort of investigation, which, of course, is not your role, which I'm certain you will explain shortly to the member.

With that said, let's be very clear. The Leader of the Opposition did not call for anything illegal in his question. He was very clear

that any sort of voluntary things that are undertaken by corporations in this province to deal with the crisis that we now face would have to be within the laws of the land. He was clear inside the Chamber and outside the Chamber on that fact. I think it's really ridiculous and unbecoming of the member to accuse – I would point of order this, but of course I can't point of order in a point of order, Madam Speaker – a member of this House, the Leader of the Official Opposition, of attempting to do something illegal or criminal. It's extremely rich, I would say, coming from that member in particular.

I will close with this. It is a matter of debate, clearly, and this member should stop wasting this Assembly's time.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I have sort of a mixed view on this point of order. I'd like to start by responding to the Official Opposition House Leader's critique of the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks' point, that he didn't have any legitimate citations. I don't think that's true. He argued that under Standing Order 23(1) a member may not introduce "any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly."

Then he went on to allege that the questions violated certain sections of the Competition Act. Now, that's a worthwhile point of discussion, but I'm not a lawyer, and I'm not versed in competition law. I don't know if the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks is, but I think it would be very hard for anyone, including yourself in the chair, Madam Speaker, to make a ruling with respect to the legality or illegality of any statement that the Leader of the Official Opposition may have made. In that sense, I'm not confident that we can dispose of this matter through a point of order here in the House. I do think it's an interesting point. I think, quite frankly, that the Leader of the Opposition is guilty of a number of transgressions. Whether or not he has violated the Competition Act is something I will leave for others to decide.

With respect to that matter, I don't believe that this is actually a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the point of order?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Can I just add something?

3:10

The Deputy Speaker: No. You have already spoken, hon. member.

I will rule that this is not a point of order and just make the comment that simply because a member in the House states that something is illegal does not necessarily make it so, and it is not the role of this Assembly to determine how the law should be applied. Notwithstanding, it was an interesting argument. I appreciate the time and effort you put into it, but it is not a point of order.

Moving on to the next, the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) in regard to a response from the Premier to the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition today in question period. There was an exchange taking place in regard to pipelines and the history of pipelines in this province. The Premier got quite upset with the Leader of the Opposition and then implied that he was not telling the truth and was essentially lying to the Chamber, which I think is disappointing. I think it's further even more disappointing when, in fact, the Leader of the Opposition gave

direct quotes that make it very, very clear that the Premier did speak against Northern Gateway, did speak against Keystone and at no time supported it, which, quite frankly, is shameful. I understand why she would be ashamed of that now, but her telling the Leader of the Opposition that he was lying or not telling the truth is extraordinarily disappointing, particularly given that all of her comments are on tape.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In respect of this matter, this gets to the approach that's been adopted by some members opposite, including the House leader and the leader, of twisting statements that have been made by people in the past or in the House in the present tense. The allegation that the Leader of the Official Opposition made was something to the effect that the Premier had urged – and I don't have the Blues – had communicated on behalf of the province of Alberta to the federal government with respect to the disposition of matters relating to the Northern Gateway pipeline, and that is absolutely untrue and is not proven by any of the suggestions and quotes that the opposition has made.

This is a question, I think, that we need to be a little bit careful about. It's a fine point to provide some quotes. All of us in this place have evolved in our views, and I want to say that this government has done nothing but act responsibly with respect to the question of pipelines. And to take statements from the past and twist them into something that they are not is, in fact, something that is at variance with the truth. If you twist something enough, it becomes an untruth, and I think that the Premier was making that point. I believe that the Leader of the Official Opposition does say many untrue things in this House, and I think the record can show that.

It's up to you, Madam Speaker, to decide whether or not the form that she used to communicate that concept, that view, was parliamentary or not. I believe that it was entirely parliamentary. She did not suggest that the Leader of the Official Opposition was lying.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the point of order?

Hon. members, I have reviewed the Blues. The hon. Premier did not accuse the Leader of the Official Opposition of intentional falsehood or lying. As noted in *Beauchesne's* paragraph 494, "it is not unparliamentary . . . to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts." Again, this is a difference in how things are interpreted and not a point of order.

I'll just mention that the third point of order was withdrawn.

Do you have another point of order, hon. member?

Mr. Nixon: We're on mine, then? I'm just making sure that we're on the same page.

The Deputy Speaker: It's yours, yes.

Point of Order

Addressing Questions through the Chair

Mr. Nixon: I will give you some reference points. *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sixth edition, page 142:

It is the custom in the House that no Member should refer to another by name. Members should be referred to in the third person as "the Honourable Member for . . .". A Minister is normally designated by the portfolio held: "The Honourable Minister of . . .".

So Health or something along those lines.

Also, Madam Speaker, in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, 2017, on page 510, under the section dealing with Principles and Guidelines for Oral Questions, it also says very clearly: “Finally, all questions and answers must be directed through the Chair.”

I rise on a point of order in regard to a response by the hon. minister of the environment to the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. The hon. minister of the environment was frustrated, as emotions sometimes get high in this place, which is fair, but certainly was not speaking through you and, in fact, was hanging over her desk pointing at the hon. member extremely aggressively. You’ll see from the Blues that, again, Madam Speaker, this is what this government does.

Ms Phillips: That’s not true.

Mr. Nixon: It’s very true, and the tape will show that. In addition to that, she was definitely, the Blues will show, talking directly to the member and then, later on in the answer to the question, turned and started to speak directly to the Leader of the Opposition, who was not even in the exchange of the question. It’s not within the practice of this House. This has come up several times. The right thing to do is to apologize and withdraw – again, emotions get high – and move on.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would suggest that – and I don’t have the Blues, but it wouldn’t surprise me in any question or answer in this place that some members occasionally lapse into referring directly to the person they’re engaged with. That happens on both sides. I don’t know if that happened in this case. But in terms of the minister of the environment looming over members way over on the other side, there are not very many people that she actually looms over, if I may say, certainly not the Opposition House Leader, so I reject that characterization. Obviously, emotions were running high, but to suggest that there was some threatening or intimidating body language: I was watching the minister when she made her answer, and I reject that characterization completely.

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

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to add my two cents to this conversation, for whatever it’s worth. In fact, conversations were a little bit heated earlier today in question period in the exchange between the minister of the environment and my hon. colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. She did lean, not loom, over her desk in a very aggressive manner, not speaking through the chair in any way, shape, or form. We’ve had this discussion yesterday and previous days during this session already, and the government continues to refuse to speak to and through the chair instead of directly and aggressively towards members opposite in this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I have the benefit of the Blues, so I do know what was said. As to any kind of motions or allegations I will have to say that the hon. minister of environment is one individual who in particular engages very, very much through the Speaker at all times, so I don’t believe that there would have been any kind of threatening or any direction against another member in this House. It’s again a good reminder that we don’t do that, but there’s no point of order.

On the last point of order?

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

Point of Order Exhibits

Mr. Mason: The hon. member opposite just showed his phone with a picture that he claimed showed the minister of the environment in the incident we’re talking about. If that member is taking photographs of other members in the House, it’s a gross violation of the rules.

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, the hon. member – I just checked with his phone – is not taking photographs. Again, talk about accusing members of something they didn’t do. The member was pointing and showing his colleagues pictures of the environment minister at a protest. That’s what he was referring to his colleagues.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I will also remind you that it isn’t appropriate to be waving around props, whether it’s your phone or whatever it might be. It simply incites disorder. Again, that’s not a point of order.

Can we get to the final point of order? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Point of Order Preambles to Supplementary Questions

Mrs. Pitt: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to make a point of some of the actions on behalf of yourself that happened during today’s question period. There was not one, not two, but three speakers of the Official Opposition that were interrupted by yourself during their questions when there were very, very clearly appropriate connector words in all of these sentences. Furthermore, when members of the government, not one, not two, but three, did extremely similar questions, although not really hard-hitting like the Official Opposition’s, you didn’t interrupt one single member. In fact, you did give a warning – I’ll give you that – but it was at the end of the question, whereas when it was members of the Official Opposition, you cut them off and in some cases didn’t let them actually resume the question. I would just ask that you call it fair and square for all members of this House. I think that speaks to the order that this Assembly should have, and I think that is something that Albertans expect to be happening in this Assembly. I ask that you call it fair and square from now on.

3:20

Mr. Mason: Well, Madam Speaker, that would normally be considered completely unacceptable by the Speaker. In this place you can do one of two things if you’re not happy with the Speaker’s ruling. One, you can rise under the standing orders and ask the Speaker to explain the reasons for a ruling. Otherwise, you can make a motion of nonconfidence, which then immediately triggers a vote, and if the vote carries, the Speaker is removed from their position. I think what we just heard from the deputy whip in the opposition was completely contrary to the rules and practices of this House and a real cheap shot, quite frankly. I’m surprised that it’s allowed.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know that the hon. Government House Leader is trying to characterize this as something else, but my understanding is that the hon. deputy

opposition House leader rose under 13(2), which allows us to ask the Speaker to explain a decision that the Speaker made. That was the context in which I heard the question, and I think that since it's within our standing orders, it's not nearly as offensive as what the Government House Leader would try to paint.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members – and I do appreciate Calgary-Hays for that clarification – I did indeed take the comment under that. That was my perspective, that it was questioning my ruling. However, the member is just cautioned for another time to make sure that you do clarify that and quote your source, that that's what you are trying to do because it's far too easy to come across as something that you just don't do in this Assembly, questioning the Speaker's ruling.

I will just say that I reminded everyone at the beginning of question period, at the beginning of question 4 that there were to be no preambles on supplementaries. You're all aware of the time limits, and that's the way it is. How you want to interpret that, what the content of that question is is a different matter, but we have time limits, and we have rules, and the rules say: no preambles on supplementaries. That's the end of that matter.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Deputy Speaker: Moving on, I believe we're at Standing Order 42. Yes. Go ahead, hon. member.

Budget 2018 Update

Mr. Ellis:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately release an updated fiscal projection given that Budget 2018 did not account for the delay in the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion and the Keystone XL pipeline or the significant differential in oil prices that is impacting Alberta jobs and the economy.

Mr. Ellis: Wonderful. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It certainly is with great urgency that I'd like to propose the motion. I'd like to certainly explain my reasons for this urgency; I may call it a crisis. You know, MLAs are being asked to vote for programs and make fiscal decisions without a clear understanding of the province's finances. Budget 2018 did not account for the current oil price differential. The government repeatedly insisted that their budget is based on two out of the three pipelines being built. In fact, I'd like to note *Hansard*, Energy's estimates on April 9, 2018, where the Energy minister said: "We need, as I mentioned earlier, two out of the three pipelines. If Kinder doesn't go, we still have [Keystone] XL and line 3. Like, we need two of the three."

I'd also like to mention the Q1 update, August 31, 2018, by the Finance minister, who said, quote: two out of the three of them are necessary to happen; Keystone XL – I think if you look at the budget book, page 104, it shows that it can take a lot of capacity far into the future, so it's an important pipeline for sure. Unquote.

The Finance minister also indicated, in a media availability on April 10, 2018, quote: we built pipeline revenues into our path to balance projections; we're confident all the pipelines will be built, so we're just going to keep going down this road. Unquote.

I'd also like to mention that this expectation was built into the budget for this government. The fiscal plan, page 48, says, "The Enbridge Line 3 replacement pipeline is anticipated to start operations by 2019, while the TransCanada Keystone XL and Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain Expansion pipelines are expected by 2021."

Also, Madam Speaker, fiscal plan, page 84:

Beginning in 2021, additional revenue resulting from the federally-imposed carbon price tied to the construction of the Trans Mountain Pipeline will be used to support vital public services as the province stays on track to balance the budget by 2023-24.

Now, this month's court ruling, Madam Speaker, delaying Keystone XL and the ongoing delay of the Trans Mountain expansion put this budget expectation into serious doubt. The fiscal plan assumed that these pipelines would be built and still put the province on track for \$100 billion of debt.

Debt under the PCs that I was a part of during that last six months of their 44-year reign: the 2014-2015 actual was, I believe, \$12.865 billion. I certainly will note that there was no borrowing for operations in that particular plan, and it certainly was the start of the oil crisis that we have currently been facing over the last number of years.

Now, the 2018-2019 budget estimate is looking at \$54.220 billion in debt, and that's a 321 per cent increase. The 2021 budget target of . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we have a point of order.

Point of Order Speaking to Urgency

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, section 42 of the Standing Orders specifically says that the member who's introducing such a motion can explain the urgency of it, but the hon. member is not doing that. He's giving a recitation of various financial documents that the government has tabled, but I don't see or hear an argument for urgency. He's essentially arguing his case, which should only happen after unanimous consent is given.

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, the Government House Leader may not have noticed, but the Speaker last time, in a discussion about a similar type of motion, allowed a government member close to 18 minutes or so, roughly, if you check *Hansard*, and our member at the same time about 14 minutes. I do think that it is fair that the member should shortly get to the point of urgency on that, but I think the Government House Leader should just let him finish saying what he has to say, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, it's not just strictly the amount of time that's taken; it's the content and the direction that it's going. I'd encourage you to get to the point and explain the urgency of the debate, please.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. You know, Madam Speaker, I certainly mentioned in the first part of my submission the urgency of the debate.

Debate Continued

Mr. Ellis: I will conclude by saying this. The people of Alberta, I believe, have a right to know, and the differential in the oil prices is at a national crisis level, affecting and impacting people, not just businesses but real people throughout this province. I think that it's important that we urge the government in a nonpartisan factor so that they can explain to the people of Alberta what this differential in oil price is having on the impact of the budget of this particular government, including, of course, the delays in the Keystone XL pipeline as well as the delays in the Trans Mountain pipeline, where we are not seeing a single inch of that pipeline being built. It is at a crisis level that we are asking and urging the government in a

nonpartisan factor to ensure that we as the people of Alberta know what is going on in regard to this financial crisis.

Thank you.

3:30

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, there's been a request for unanimous consent under Standing Order 42.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 19

An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education

[Debate adjourned November 7: Mr. Hanson speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise in the House and speak to legislation. Today is no exception as we go forward speaking about Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education. Earlier this session the Minister of Advanced Education tabled Bill 19 in the Legislature. Among other things, starting in the 2020-21 academic year, this bill proposes to legislate an inflation-based cap on increases to domestic student and apprenticeship tuitions. The bill proposes that the cap be based on the annual change in Alberta's consumer price index. If passed, the act would amend the Post-secondary Learning Act to implement the province's revised tuition framework.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Also of note, Bill 19 originally gave the minister power to regulate noninstructional fees and international student tuitions. The Advanced Education minister, through this bill, would also have the power to dictate a tuition freeze but in the event of a required increase in tuition, as said a minute ago, would be unable to raise said tuition higher than Alberta's consumer price index. Also, exceptional tuition increases on individual programs will be determined by regulations set by the minister.

Another alteration that the legislation proposes: changes in student representation on boards of governors, by having two student representatives at all institutions. If the school in question has a graduate program, the number of student representatives on a board of governors would be three.

It is clear that the students' groups will likely be quite taken with the fact that tuition fees would have a cap on them. This is something that advanced education students in Alberta have been asking for for quite a while. I'm sure that the students' groups would also be onside with the increase in the representation on the board of governors. Madam Speaker, this is great. Students need a voice, and they're receiving a little more of that voice in this bill. I guess it could really be stated that the major stakeholder of postsecondary institutions is the students that use those facilities, so when we talk about governance of those that actually are attending the college or university, being more fairly represented at the table where decisions that may actually affect them are made, I think, should be well received by the students.

Bill 19 also allows colleges to transition to university status without legislative amendments, which of course will streamline the process should this action be required. Madam Speaker, in my

elected cycle I've had situations similar to this being brought forward by folks from the town of Drumheller who wanted to be involved with Red Deer College.

The bill also makes a few changes to the names of the different types of postsecondary institutions. Also, there will be some level of predictability to institutions if Bill 19 receives royal assent. All in all, the legislation does indeed constitute a lot of changes, but I think that for the most part the changes follow what students and the institutions have been seeking for some time.

Now, I guess one of the perhaps negative parts of the bill is that the Minister of Advanced Education, upon passing of this bill, originally would have too much discretion over noninstructional fees and international student tuitions. But with the amendment that was passed in the Committee of the Whole, I'm glad to see that student councils will have to sign off on this now and that if a board chooses to raise it, it will be to just cover the costs. It won't be profit driven. We will have to watch to see what the final result actually ends up looking like with regard to international students.

I myself did not seek a university education, Madam Speaker, although I did attend Red Deer College for one year. There were some courses there – I think in slang we called it beer drinking 101. I lined up my life's work after that entirely on my decision, on my own direction. But my son went to college, went to NAIT, and has worked diligently on his oil field instrumentation certificate although with the downturn in the oil patch, he's come back to our family farm and now manages that. He manages that to a great degree, and I'm very proud of his leadership in that position.

Madam Speaker, as parents we certainly weren't rich parents, far from it. What we had we earned by hard work and saving and appreciated the opportunity that the government of the day allowed us. I'm sorry I digress in that regard, but I can say that my wife and I worked very hard and did without in many cases – I think my wife would probably attribute that in greater volume than I do – so that our son could have the ability to explore another career if he so desired. My family is extremely proud of that option that our son has. That is always a good start for a child, and I think most would agree. We also did the similar situation with our daughter who now works in the city here for Enbridge and has escaped many of the corporate layoffs to date.

As much as I had paid for our children's education and had a child or children enter the postsecondary system, I guess I did not realize what instructional fees, at the time, actually were. I had a brief interlude of that myself, but I did not know what they now cost. My wife or I just wrote the cheque.

As a result of that, I looked up what noninstructional fees were at the University of Alberta. This is what I discovered. Those fees at that institution include student health and wellness fees, a student academic support fee, students' union membership, students' union dedicated fees, student union health plan, student union dental plan, a physical activity and wellness centre fee, and a U-Pass fee, which provides eligible students unlimited access to regular Edmonton, St. Albert, and Strathcona county transit fees for fall, winter, spring, and summer academic terms. This fee is assessed to all students registered in on-campus courses in the fall and winter terms. There is also an athletic centre recreation fee. The list is quite onerous. For an on-campus, full-time student those fees add up to just under \$1,000. That alone is a substantial fee, especially for a student.

I understand that with the passing of Bill 19, should there come a time when a new fee in this area is proposed, students will have the opportunity to approve those fees, and if approved, they won't be costed for profit. As an aside, I don't necessarily blame the institution that levied those fees. They have to recover their costs. At the time they were finding that their streams of revenue were sort of drying up, so any way to recoup those expenses, in my

opinion, was a requirement, some might say a form of a business requirement, in order to keep their heads above the financial water. I think you'll find out that students should be pleased to see that the regulations will now include certain caveats to those noninstructional fees, because, Madam Speaker, student fees, as I just pointed out, can certainly be a significant cost to students.

3:40

Something else that is good to see is the fact that the minister has said that the Alberta institutions will be required to tell international students exactly what those tuitions may be or would cost for the entire length of their degree-earning process. Those numbers have been kind of up in the air in the past for both the institution and the student.

A provincial tuition freeze has been on for some time in Alberta, and the institutions were not able to increase general tuition, which would of course have increased the costs to international students. It was kind of a tight spot for an institution to be in, once again because sources of revenue for institutions were getting to be a smaller list. Without getting into the politics of the institution, as a person looking at this with no skin in the game, how else would the university proceed? The university was not able to use either domestic tuition or the government grant to subsidize international tuition fees, so the international students were somewhat being used as a revenue source themselves. I'm not saying that was good or bad; I'm only hoping to infer reality, merely a business decision again to stay above the waterline.

Once again, the minister has made it clear that international students will now know exactly what their education will cost them. It stops tuition for those international students from rising unexpectedly during their educational programs, which makes a lot of sense, very frankly. I believe that that will also be a part of regulations, so we will of course be watching to see what those regulations actually look like when the time comes.

Now, Madam Speaker, here we are in the fall session of the Fourth Session of the 29th Legislature, six to eight months out from a provincial election, and we still have one issue, one that constituents bring up on a regular basis to me and my caucus members. That issue is the carbon tax, and the carbon tax, as far as further learning institutions in Alberta are concerned, is becoming a large financial issue. It appears that it may become an even larger issue if and when the carbon tax increases. You talk about revenue streams drying up and institutions needing to cut some of their expenses in order to keep their tuitions in line. This falls into that discussion. Sixty-six per cent of Albertans have a terrible taste in their mouth because of that tax. They feel betrayed because the government forgot to mention the fact that if they were elected, they would submit Albertans to a tax which would change their way of life in a negative way in this province.

I know, Madam Speaker, that we're talking about Bill 19, and to stay on that track, trying to address affordability without postsecondary education – but I wonder if the minister has considered just how much the carbon tax costs these postsecondary institutions. I've heard some pretty large numbers bandied about. For one of the larger institutions in Alberta, in fact, it was well into the seven-digit numbers. Just like a farmer or a small-business man in Alberta or the average homeowner that has been forced to pay this tax, that was not part of the government's campaign, institutions were levied a carbon tax as well, I'm sure, in some cases severely injuring their cost-profit line. If the institution in question did not have that seven-digit carbon tax to pay annually, would the bottom line of that institution or of every institution that is forced to pay the carbon tax, for that matter, not be in a better position than they find themselves in now? It would of course be better for the

students than those facilities, better for the students' bottom line as well.

Universities and colleges don't heat themselves in the winter or cool themselves in the summer without the added expense of the carbon tax. Bus passes for students to get to or from their chosen institution of learning don't continue to go up for no reason at all. The city is forced to increase fees like that because it costs more for the city to run those buses as a result of this unadvertised tax. While finding legislative ideas that make education more accessible and affordable for our students is a gallant effort, let's not forget that one tax that really does weigh on the bottom line of our educational institutions.

In rural areas it also weighs on our school divisions, especially in the rural areas that have long distances to transport their children to education. Let's not forget who actually gets to pay that tax that makes life more difficult: the Alberta taxpayer, Madam Speaker. There's only one taxpayer in Alberta, the guy or gal that is always in the sights of the government finance guru that is always looking for more money. You can only go to the well so often. Perhaps government, considering that these publicly funded institutions in Alberta should get a break from that money-grabbing tax, could ease a lot of financial problems for those places that we send our children to for their further education.

Let's also not forget that when the carbon tax bill was before the House a couple of years ago, the Official Opposition stood in this Legislature and made that very recommendation to the government, that recommendation being that the government should not be adding cost to a student's further education by levelling the carbon tax on our postsecondary institutions. We pressed amendments to that bill. We talked about it in just about all of our speeches, and I think everyone in this House and all Albertans remember that this government went ahead, levied that tax, which has been making life more difficult rather than necessarily better for those that choose, in this case, Madam Speaker, further education.

And look, we in the Official Opposition certainly understand how hard students work to get a postsecondary education. It takes a lot to get a student through to graduation. Madam Speaker, I know that times two.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak to Bill 19, An Act to Improve Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education. Being a very proud graduate from the Campus Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta, I truly understand the importance of an excellent postsecondary education. I truly believe that I received the best education, and I know that I would not be here today without the lessons that I learned during my time at the Campus Saint-Jean. I had the opportunity to study political science, which helped to prepare me for my current position. The education I received shaped my future.

The Campus Saint-Jean is a very unique campus at the University of Alberta, that offers courses taught in French and offers a francophone learning environment. It is within Edmonton's francophone quarter. If any of you guys in the House haven't taken an opportunity to go and see the University of Alberta's Campus Saint-Jean, I would really welcome that you go and take a tour. I consider the Campus Saint-Jean as the crown jewel of the University of Alberta's crown, offering a fantastic opportunity for all those that study there and live nearby.

Part of the reason that I chose to study at the Campus Saint-Jean was an affordability factor. It was partially due to the fact that I was able to qualify for a substantially larger number of scholarships and complete my bachelor's degree without any debt. Being from Fort McMurray, I didn't qualify for student loans, and this was my opportunity to be able to complete an education. I was able to graduate without any debt, also due to the fact that I was able to get a very well-paid summer job through my time in university working at oil sands operations, which gave me both real-life job skills and much-needed funds to help pay for my high-quality education in French here in Alberta.

Now, there are many benefits of postsecondary education, and there are many postsecondary education institutions throughout Alberta, including seven in Calgary. In total those schools have about 88,000 students and more than 10,000 full-time employees. There are some major economic benefits for the Calgary region. Calgary Economic Development puts a dollar figure on the economic impact of Calgary's seven postsecondary institutions at about \$8.6 billion in additional income for the region in 2014-2015. That is a substantial amount of additional income. Over a lifetime the economic impact of higher education for the students, the taxpayer, and society in Alberta is in excess of \$180 billion. The study concluded that taxpayers benefit from a 17.6 per cent rate of return on investments in Calgary postsecondary institutions. It also determined that for every dollar invested, \$3.50 was generated in economic benefits. That's a pretty good return on investment. The total impact of research activities at the seven institutions in Calgary totalled \$663.3 million, including \$278.6 million in productivity gains.

3:50

Postsecondary education also provides a lot of societal gains; it's not just about economic impact. There's ample research that suggests that individuals that have been to a college, a university, or a postsecondary institution are more likely to engage in many civic activities, including volunteering at a higher rate, higher levels of donations, voting at a higher rate. They generally have a lower unemployment rate and are less likely to require social assistance in general. Furthermore, university graduates tend to rate their physical and mental health higher than those with fewer years of postsecondary education and are actually less likely to smoke. Happiness and life satisfaction also tend to increase with the number of years of education.

We are very fortunate in Alberta to have many postsecondary institutions throughout this great province offering a variety of programs and areas of study. For example, in Fort McMurray we have Keyano College. It was opened in 1965 as the Alberta Vocational Centre and reopened in 1975 as Keyano, which is a Cree word that roughly means sharing. Keyano has grown significantly over the years and has a series of campuses throughout the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, with their principal site at the Clearwater campus in downtown Fort McMurray and regional campuses in Fort MacKay, Conklin, Janvier, and Fort Chipewyan. They offer specialized courses and training to more than 2,800 full-time students and over 13,000 part-time students in a variety of learning opportunity methods, including classroom, online, and blended delivery models.

Back to the bill. One of the positive aspects that this bill includes is increased student representation on the board of governors. This has been something that I've been hearing about since I was a university student, and I'm happy to see that the government included this within Bill 19. I know that this was one of the number one asks at the U of A Students' Union back then, and I don't think that's changed.

Furthermore, the revised tuition framework truly increases stability and predictability when it comes to how much students will pay for university. This is something student groups have been pushing for for many, many years. It really helps with planning year over year, and I hope it will help to increase the number of students who are able to complete their education. I had a few friends that had to delay their plans for university due to the fact that tuition had increased substantially. I know first-hand just how hard students work in order to obtain their education, many working one, two, or three part-time jobs just in order to make ends meet. In fact, I've got friends that worked full-time jobs just to be able to make ends meet. I can't imagine how difficult it was for them. I was very grateful to only have to work one part-time job through university.

I'm very pleased to see that the minister has said that postsecondary institutions will be required to advise international students what their tuition costs will be for the length of their programs. This stability will help to attract international students, who add so much to our learning environment. Campus Saint-Jean has a vibrant international community, with many students originating from a variety of countries such as Morocco, Lebanon, Côte-d'Ivoire. Their experiences and traditions truly added to my overall education that I received at Campus Saint-Jean.

Furthermore, I'm happy to see that the regulations will now include the noninstructional fees and not just tuition fees. The fees can be ever-increasing, and sometimes it's just a few dollars that make a big difference.

Our priority in government overall should be to ensure that our postsecondary education system has longevity. We need to ensure that students can continue to advance their education and contribute to our society. However, this government has been bombarding students with policies that make it more difficult to go to school.

Let's look at some of the struggles added on to students through the carbon tax. The cost in a typical Alberta household of a \$30 a tonne carbon tax is about \$667 a year. That's more than the cost of a single standard course at a postsecondary institution in Alberta. One course. That's the carbon tax price. At \$50 a tonne it's about \$1,100. That's almost two standard courses at a postsecondary institution here in Alberta. There's also the increased cost of utility payments, fuel prices. It truly raises the cost of everything. Furthermore, it takes millions of dollars out of the pockets of our schools and postsecondary institutions, making postsecondary institutions look for other ways to be able to raise funds. The cost of the carbon tax to postsecondary institutions is quite large. This government still needs to address just how it plans to help postsecondary institutions pay for these large, increased costs.

Then, Madam Speaker, there's also the issue of a \$15 minimum wage, which negatively affects many students. Minimum wage hikes negatively affect employment amongst low-skilled and young workers at a much higher rate. Furthermore, evidence has shown that on average a 10 per cent increase in the minimum wage decreases youth employment by between 3 and 6 per cent. That's truly a lot of students. Furthermore, one academic study, for instance, found that minimum wage hikes actually increase the share of families that fall below the relative poverty line, which suggests that low-income families are hurt even more by the reduced employment opportunities emanating from minimum wage hikes. Most students need to find jobs to work at when they're in school, and many students that I have spoken to work, like I said, full-time hours just to support themselves. The reduced economic opportunities for our youth are creating large barriers for those trying to receive an education.

These two concerns also affect the potential for new graduates to find work here in Alberta. Alberta's unemployment rate is at 7.3 per cent, the highest of all provinces outside of Atlantic Canada.

Furthermore, Calgary has an outstandingly scary unemployment rate of 8.2 per cent, making it the second highest in the country.

The increased costs on our job creators limit the number of growth positions. We've heard many cases of small, medium, and large employers that have slowed their growth and aren't hiring as many employees due to the increased cost to their operation. Employers are more likely to cut hours and freeze hiring if their costs are continually rising.

Furthermore, with the seven credit downgrades since this government took office three and a half years ago, it means that we are paying more for interest and we're paying more to service our debt at an ever-increasing rate. Truly, the list goes on.

Under the NDP's current plan debt will climb to nearly \$71 billion by 2021, and someone's going to need to pay that back. If we want our future generations to succeed, we can't keep passing our mismanagement on to future generations. If we want our postsecondary institutions to remain viable, we must rein in our spending so that we can continue to support a good, high-quality education here for all Albertans. The government needs to make sure that they're creating an environment so that current postsecondary students have meaningful employment upon their graduation.

Now, amongst all of these poor decisions made by this government over the last three and a half years, I'm grateful that this government has brought forward this piece of legislation. It's a step in the right direction when it comes to ensuring the longevity of postsecondary institutions. It also ensures that we continue to have world-class postsecondary education offered right here in Alberta. Education has numerous benefits for our economy, for our society, our communities, and it is one of the reasons that our province is the best place in the world to live.

I would like to thank all of the students that have contributed to this very important bill. We will continue to consult with you in order to create the most efficient and highest quality education possible.

I hope all members have heard my arguments, and I look forward to rising in the House in support of this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to rise today and speak to this bill. You know, this bill was one of the primary reasons why I got into politics in the first place. Actually, the hon. minister was one of the first – well, at that point he was still a candidate – people that I met who was invested in politics as well.

Now, we all know that postsecondary education is so vitally important to the health of our communities. Indeed, it's often associated with seeking better income for you later in life. It's also associated with strengthening our citizenship here in our community. So I am so happy to see that this bill finally comes forward.

4:00

One of the reasons why I am so happy to see this come forward is that prior to running as a candidate myself, I was involved with the MacEwan NDP at a time when the then government, now the opposition, was cutting the funding to postsecondary education. And, worse, they were cutting funding to education immediately after they told postsecondary education that they were in fact going

to raise funding by 2 per cent. This put everybody in a very nervous position because nobody knew what was going to happen.

I knew so many students who had already had their programs phased out halfway through a degree. One of them started studying Middle East and African studies. He was barely able to find the credits through the rest of the institution to pass with that degree. This was at a time and we still are in a time where studying the Middle East is so vitally important to our foreign policy and to our trade around the world. You know, it seems every time I check a newspaper or watch the 6 o'clock news you hear something about Saudi Arabia or Turkey or Syria, and this is so important for us as a community to understand.

I'm very proud to serve with a government that is not just protecting and investing in postsecondary but is indeed ensuring that more and more people have access to affordable postsecondary education. You know, I myself, right out of high school, first went to NAIT for graphic communications, and I finished that course. I actually recently ran into one of my former instructors, and she was very happy, although a little bit confused about how I ended up as a politician, to hear how one of her students was progressing in their career.

But many of my classmates could barely afford to attend class. You know, I was very fortunate. My family lived in the area, so I had the opportunity to stay at home while I was in school, and that meant that I didn't have all of the expenses of rent. My parents always made the agreement that as long as I was in school, I wouldn't have to pay rent. I was responsible for my own books and such, of course, but I wouldn't have to worry about rent. But many of my classmates were living three or four people in a two-bedroom suite, in a basement suite in fact, just so that they were able to afford to get an education. When I was at NAIT – this was a one-year course – I was always amazed at the dedication to pursuing education that a lot of my classmates had.

Later on, of course, I went to MacEwan and studied political science, and while some people will claim that I dropped out, I didn't drop out. I am currently in a class about leadership and governance, you know, deep into the research on that paper, which has been fascinating.

It's so important for the province to ensure that we have accessible postsecondary education and that we have predictable postsecondary education because the more people that are able to pursue a postsecondary education, the stronger our economy is, indeed the stronger our democracy is. I am so proud to finally see that we will have predictable tuition rates in this province. This is something that is long overdue.

You know, so many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle have talked about the advocacy of CAUS and all of the other student organizations, but this is something that we were calling for long before that. Predictable education was something that we were talking about when we were on the steps of the Legislature protesting an, effective, 9 per cent cut to the budget of our institutions.

An Hon. Member: It's going to hurt.

Mr. Horne: And then we have members opposite talking about how their proposed cuts are going to hurt. We'll see how that ends up if they ever form government again.

I am very happy to support this, and I hope all of my members do as well. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Advanced Education to close debate.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise and close debate on Bill 19, An Act to Improve the Affordability and Accessibility of Post-secondary Education. I want to thank all of my colleagues for their interventions in the debate on this matter. I think there have been a number of issues around the affordability piece that have been well canvassed, that I won't repeat.

There are some things about the bill, though, that I do want to highlight that haven't been mentioned so much; namely, around enhancing the accessibility of education, particularly around creating a pathway to university status for Red Deer College and Grande Prairie Regional College. Those were requests that were made by those institutions to this government as well as previous governments for years, and I'm glad that our government has taken upon itself to finally grant that request. That will go a long way to providing educational opportunities, university degrees to the students in northwestern Alberta and in central Alberta who for whatever reason cannot make the trip to Edmonton or Calgary to pursue a university degree there. I'm quite proud that our government has finally taken action to allow Red Deer College and Grande Prairie Regional College to grant their own university degrees.

In addition to that, Madam Speaker, this bill recognizes the university status of the Alberta College of Art and Design. It only makes sense that an institution that grants university degrees be called a university by name, and this legislation, of course, grants that title to that institution. I think the students of that institution will be better off having graduated from a university than from an institution that was formerly known as a college. It creates less confusion. Getting a university degree from a university causes far fewer questions than getting a university degree from a college, and I'm quite pleased that we've been able to rectify that situation.

In addition, we are changing the governance structures significantly of MacEwan University and Mount Royal University. This was work left undone by the previous Conservative government. In order to be recognized among their peers as universities, universities need to have governance structures that their peers recognize. This bill changes the governance structures of MacEwan University and Mount Royal University. It allows them to create for the first time general faculties councils, which are the standard way of governing academic affairs at universities all across this country. It will also grant MacEwan University and Mount Royal University the ability to appoint chancellors and grant honorary degrees, which are the most prestigious awards that universities can confer on somebody, Madam Speaker.

This will enhance the reputation of those institutions in the eyes of their peers across the country. We hope that by doing that, we will allow graduates of MacEwan University and Mount Royal University to pursue graduate opportunities at universities across the country that weren't quite sure what to make of MacEwan University and Mount Royal University with the structures that were in place before this legislation was brought forward to this House.

In addition, of course, we are increasing the student representation on the boards of governors of colleges and technical institutes across the province. It's the case that universities have two undergraduate representatives on their boards of governors, so in our minds it's only fair that technical institutes like NAIT and SAIT and community colleges like Medicine Hat College, Keyano College, Olds College, Lakeland College, among others, have two representatives on their boards of governors. Madam Speaker, this

government has the backs of students. We believe that students are the most important stakeholder in the postsecondary world. By enhancing their voice in the governance structures of their institutions, we give them a lot more say and power over their education, and we think that that is going to be a benefit to the students.

4:10

You know, with respect to strengthening student voice, of course, we have done a lot to enhance students' control over the cost of their education. Not only are we providing them with a guarantee that the cost of their tuition won't increase more than the consumer price index here in Alberta, we are also giving them a say over whether or not they are charged new mandatory noninstructional fees, Madam Speaker. The past practice of university administrations springing mandatory noninstructional fees upon students by surprise has come to an end, and we are pleased that we are finally giving students the power to say yes or no to those fees.

We believe that students won't be unreasonable in rejecting these fees. Students accept that a university or college education has a cost attached to it and that the cost should be shared between the taxpayers of Alberta and the students themselves. They just want those fees to be fair and reasonable, and they want to know what the money is being used for, Madam Speaker. That's why this legislation will bring in unprecedented transparency around the use of mandatory noninstructional fees and give students the power to say yes or no. If those mandatory noninstructional fees, of course, pass the reasonability test that I think students will impose upon them, I am sure that students will be happy to accept those and reasonably have a significant amount of control over the cost of their education.

In the remaining time, though, I want to address a larger issue that I think was highlighted in this debate. Even though both sides of this House are voting in favour of this legislation, Madam Speaker, it's not true to say that we both share the same vision for postsecondary education in this province. On our side of the House ever since we were elected in 2015, this government has provided significant financial support to universities both in increases in operating grants as well as increases in capital grants. When we took office, the former Prentice government, of course, was set to make significant cuts to higher education institutions. We reversed those cuts. In addition, we provided them with a 2 per cent increase in their operating grant that year, and we've provided them with 2 per cent increases in their operating grants every year since.

One of the issues, of course, that has been raised by some of the stakeholders when we've consulted with them about this legislation is their concern over constriction of revenues. In fact, some of the members opposite have raised that concern. It's true, Madam Speaker, that this legislation will constrain the revenues of institutions. In order for us to have a strong public higher education system in this province that remains affordable for the students of this province, it means that the government has to commit the additional revenues on the operating side of the balance sheet that are constrained on the tuition side.

Certainly, it's our belief that the taxpayers have a significant responsibility to provide high-quality higher education opportunities to every Albertan regardless of their financial or geographic circumstances. That's, in fact, the bargain that we're making in constraining institutional revenues in the way that we have and guaranteeing affordability for students in the way that we have. In order for us to continue to have a high-quality higher education system in this province that meets the needs of all Alberta students, it's now incumbent upon the government to make up the difference in operating revenues. We've done that in the past, and you can rest

assured, Madam Speaker, that under this government in the future we will continue to meet our commitments to providing high-quality higher education by ensuring that every university and college has the operational revenues that they need to provide that education.

In fact, Madam Speaker, if we were to implement the policy suggestions that we've received from our colleagues across the floor, we would limit the quality of higher education in this province. Some of the members opposite, of course, when they were in the former PC caucus, presented a shadow budget that presented a \$400 million cut to the higher education budget of the government of Alberta. Of course, now they're voting in favour of constraining the tuition revenue that would be available to the institutions through the tuition side of the balance sheet, which means that that will reduce the number of opportunities for Alberta students to get a high-quality education. That means fewer classroom spaces for university and college students. That will mean fewer programs. That will mean reduced opportunities, like I said, for Alberta students.

In fact, Madam Speaker, we believe that that's the wrong way to take the province. We've got one of the youngest and fastest growing populations of any province in the entire country, and we need to invest more dollars in our higher education system, not make \$400 million cuts to the budget of the higher education portfolio, in order to have a well-educated population that is competitive in the global marketplace but also has citizens who are well prepared to engage in the public life of our province.

I don't want anybody out there who's just casually observing this debate to think that because both sides have voted in favour of this legislation, we have similar views on how to enhance higher education in this province, because nothing could be further from the truth, Madam Speaker. We have very different views on how higher education should be operated in this province. Our government, through our past actions and through this legislation, is committed to continuing to provide opportunities for every single Albertan, regardless of their financial or geographic circumstances, through increasing the operating grants of each university and college and guaranteeing the affordability by preventing significant tuition hikes.

In addition to that, Madam Speaker, a tangential theme that's arisen over the course of the debate is on how best to support students outside of the framework of the higher education budget and tuition legislation. Certainly, we've heard a number of concerns around youth unemployment, and we believe that youth unemployment is a significant problem. We certainly recognize, like many have, that students have to work hard to pay for their education. That's indeed true. In fact, our government has made significant progress in providing increased opportunities for students to pay their bills while they're going to school.

We reinstated the STEP program, that was cut by the previous Conservative government, that gave thousands of students summer jobs at decent wages that would allow them to pay their tuition, Madam Speaker. I was a beneficiary of STEP student programs while I was in university. I certainly wouldn't have been able to afford the tuition had I not been privy to those opportunities, and many students in Alberta would also be in the same boat if we had continued on with the decision of the previous Prentice government to cut that program.

In addition, it's remarkable to me to hear members of the Official Opposition wonder in amazement at how hard students have to work, that they have to work two or three or four part-time jobs to make ends meet, and then in the same breath say that we need to cut the minimum wage. Madam Speaker, the only thing that that would result in is the need for a student to go out and find a fifth or

sixth or seventh part-time job to make ends meet. It's our government's belief that we're supporting students by giving them a decent minimum wage that provides them the ability to pay their bills and make their way through school. It's astounding to me that in one breath we have members opposite marvelling at how hard they have to work and then in the next breath saying: "You know what? We think you should have to work a lot harder to be able to pay for school." That's not acceptable, and that's why our government will continue to make sure that we have a decent minimum wage to support students so that they can make ends meet and pay their way through school.

The other thing that they've brought up to support students is a reduction of the carbon tax. Madam Speaker, of course, eliminating the carbon tax is a magic bullet that the UCP offers for every problem. I don't know. If we've got wildfires, reducing the carbon tax would somehow help with that, or if the sun is shining too brightly, maybe reducing the carbon tax would help with that as well. But it's ludicrous for them to insist that by cutting the carbon tax, we're going to make . . .

4:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

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

Bill 22 An Act for Strong Families Building Stronger Communities

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in regard to this bill? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 22, An Act for Strong Families Building Stronger Communities. I'm extremely honoured to stand here as the United Conservative Children's Services critic and to participate in this important event.

Madam Chair, I honestly don't think that there is a single person that I've talked to in my role, in my privilege that I have as an MLA, who hasn't been deeply, deeply affected by what happened to Serenity. It's such a tragic story, and it broke the hearts of so many Albertans. It was a clarion call to action for all of us here in this Assembly to fix this extremely broken system that failed this little girl. So many of us here are parents, and while you don't need to be a parent to be heartbroken and angry about Serenity's death, I know that the parents in this room have put themselves in her mother's shoes many, many times. I know that I have. I can't even begin to tell you how that makes me feel. I think I can say on behalf of many people that heartbroken and angry doesn't even come close to describing how we feel.

There was a great deal of advocacy from this side that pushed towards striking the child intervention panel. When the panel was struck, I think all of us were hopeful that things would happen that would help to make sure that this would never happen again. I was so deeply honoured to have been asked to serve as our caucus's critic for Children's Services, especially coming on late to the panel, and being able to participate for even a short while was a

tremendous privilege. I would deeply, deeply, from the bottom of my heart like to thank the hon. members for Calgary-Hays, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, and Airdrie for the incredible work they did preceding my ability to be able to join that panel. I'm forever grateful for the time and energy and advocacy that came from them on this panel.

Coming in at that point in time, it was so disappointing to find out that during the panel discussions the panel wasn't permitted to investigate the circumstances around Serenity's death, which, in my understanding, was why we were there in the first place. It was the whole reason there was a new ministry created. The panel members were barely even allowed to speak her name, Madam Chair.

Then the question is: how are you supposed to figure out how a system has failed Serenity – or anybody else, for that matter – and her siblings, I might add? How were we supposed to see where and how she fell through the cracks if we weren't actually able to ask the questions? How, then, are you supposed to make changes in legislation to ensure that this incredible tragedy doesn't happen again?

Like I said, I came into the panel quite late in the game, and the assumption when I went into the panel was that these discussions would be very, very intense and deep and strong and digging into the weeds as to what had happened here. But that's not what happened. I think the concern is that I certainly don't have answers to those questions. The panel doesn't know the answers to those questions because we were not allowed, Madam Chair, to ask those questions.

I have to say that, based on the legislation that we have here before us, I don't think the NDP has the answers to those questions either. There is nothing in this legislation that would prevent a similar tragedy from befalling another child in care. That's a tragedy. It's concerning because in the legislation there's no reassurance to Albertans that the government has identified – and this is the bigger issue here, Madam Chair. How do we identify how this happened so that we're actually taking steps to prevent that from happening again to somebody else's daughter, somebody else's baby?

There is nothing here in this legislation that truly gives me faith that the NDP was ever serious about fixing this broken system for good. Serenity was subjected to sexual abuse, starvation. She was hypothermic. She had a fractured skull. Her caregiver said that she had fallen from a swing. Now, the heartbreaking information that came from this, I think, changed everybody in this House. It's disappointing that we are not able to figure out a way to make sure that this doesn't happen.

However, I would like to outline what I also believe are positive changes in this legislation. One of them is that there has been a loophole that has been closed that previously permitted private guardianship applications to be considered without a home assessment completed by a qualified social worker. That is a very good step in the right direction.

I'm also pleased to see the bill replace the word "survival" with the word "safety" throughout the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. At the end of the day, Madam Chair, don't we want to do so much more for these children than merely ensuring their survival? I would hope so. Albertans and families are looking to us to not only put a roof over their heads but to protect them from harm and to also nurture them, to help them to grow and lead happy and productive lives. These are very complex situations. There's nothing simple about this legislation. There's still so much to be done on that front, but at least a change in the language that clearly communicates that goal is a step in the right direction.

Another positive change that Bill 22 proposes is to implement the child intervention panel's recommendations that the legislation

governing the child welfare system be more culturally sensitive when dealing with indigenous families and children and the communities.

The bill is not without its merits, Madam Chair, far from it, but the problem is that we have the bad far outweighing the good. The call to action that was brought forward by the opposition: the action is not there.

4:30

One of the more important things that we need to bring up – and the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre brought this up on several occasions – was with respect to the publication ban. Why is it that this legislation does nothing to address the publication ban that is currently in place when a child dies in government care? This was brought up over and over and over again on this side of the House. In fact, the publication ban was another thing that the panel wasn't even allowed to consider. We weren't even allowed to ask questions about that. Why?

The ban shrouds the entire system, Madam Chair, in secrecy, and it just absolutely takes away from any ability to have public accountability. Isn't that why we were here in the first place? It's why we were here in the first place: public accountability, making sure these tragedies never happen again, making sure that the government was accountable not only to the people but to the children that they have in their care. Yet we're not even allowed to ask questions about that. Isn't the lack of transparency with respect to system failures the whole reason why we're here debating this legislation? The implementation of the legislation has to be strong, and it has to have calls to action. So something has to be done to ensure that any publication ban prescribed by the legislation serves in the best interests of the child and not in the best interests of the department. The child, not the department.

There are a number of other recommendations coming out of the panel's work that don't feature at all in the legislation, which leaves me with one glaring question: why? Why isn't the government falling all over itself, Madam Chair, to implement these recommendations in an effort to provide the very best child intervention system that it possibly can? That's what we're talking about. Instead, we get a few improvements, but largely we are left with the same broken system that failed Serenity. The answer that we're getting from the government is that this is just phase 1 of three, but if there are not strong pieces in this legislation that show us that we're heading in a direction that will actually protect a child, then why are we here?

This is unacceptable to me. Quite often in this situation all you can do is imagine what that little girl went through, a little girl padding across a trailer in the middle of the night in her bare feet, trying to find food to eat and was not able to get food to eat and then was beaten for taking food and was sexually assaulted and weighed the size of a very small baby by the time she was taken into care. That's the picture that needs to remain with all of us when we're actually carving out this kind of legislation.

Despite a few improvements, it's very difficult to support this legislation.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt. I just want to remind all the members in the House of section 23(g) of the standing orders of sub judice. This matter is currently before the courts. If we could just refrain from getting into any detail specifics that may create issues.

Mrs. Aheer: Absolutely, Madam Chair. I don't think I'm really aware of any other details other than the ones that have been released, but thank you for the reminder. I appreciate it.

I need to mention, though, while we're talking about this, that the assumption is that after Serenity passed away, you move on to doing a panel discussion. Yet we have more children in care.

I'd like to describe a particular case. All of us received this from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, Madam Chair. This is a young adult, actually, now. His name was Dakota. It's happening right now. So Dakota at the age of three was found with cigarette burns on his body. Cigarette burns. Then he was placed four more times before his fifth birthday. Then from five to seven years he was moved three more times, multiple times. Then after that he was returned to his parents, who were unable to take care of him, and then taken back from his parents and put into foster care. At that time he was assaulted by an older peer, sexually assaulted, and that was one of several times that he was sexually assaulted. This is in 2018. By the time he was 14 he had moved 14 times.

This is happening now, after a year and a half of a panel discussion that has happened and no implementation of legislation that is helping out Dakota. This has happened. This boy has died.

We're talking about complex needs with all of these children, too. They're coming from extreme trauma, Madam Chair, and they need access to experts. So many people even have a difficult time in knowing how to deal with these children and the trauma that they have faced.

This legislation does not honour Serenity, and it does not honour Dakota and all of the other children that are listed in the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, so I would urge my honourable colleagues on the government benches to go back to the drawing board and come back with comprehensive legislation that will work to keep kids safe and reassure Albertans that what happened to Serenity and Dakota and all of the others – I could list all of the names for you – doesn't happen again. What we have to do before us today is simply make sure that we do that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to move an amendment. I have the requisite number of copies here with the original, of course. I shall wait for you to receive them.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, please go ahead. Your amendment will be referred to as amendment A1.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, ma'am. I would like to move that Bill 22, An Act for Strong Families Building Stronger Communities, be amended in section 4 by renumbering the proposed section 2 as section 2(1) and by adding the following after section 2(1):

(2) Nothing in subsection (1) shall be interpreted as derogating from the obligation to report a child in need under section 4.

Madam Chair, the amendment before you addresses one of the aspects of Bill 22 that concerns many of us in our UCP caucus and, may I say, almost everyone in this Chamber, and that is the lack of accountability in this act for adults involved with children in need of intervention. The wording of this motion may look somewhat familiar to some members of this Assembly. If so, it's because you have seen the concept before in a private member's bill that I have brought forward at least two times now. While its official name last time it appeared on the Order Paper was Bill 216, I've always referred to it and many have referred to it as Serenity's law. I'm hoping that the members here today will take a new look at the changes proposed under Serenity's law and agree with me that this should become part of Bill 22 here today.

Madam Chair, if I could explain as to why. This bill has been called An Act for Strong Families Building Stronger Communities, and this amendment will, in my opinion, do that. It does so in a clear and a very simple way. This amendment would at least attempt to make all adults responsible to contact authorities if they know a child is in need of intervention. It seems so simple. In the spring of 2017 I promised a young lady who was Serenity's mother that I would do my best as a legislator, as an Albertan, to convince my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to implement this simple change that would save the lives of children here in Alberta. We know it's too late for this little girl, Serenity, but we all know that she's here with us today in spirit.

4:40

Her mother, who we have remained in contact with, you know, told us only a few weeks ago that when this bill was introduced and she actually read this bill, it's reinforcing many of the things that are already in place, but it's really the component of my previous bill, which was Serenity's law, that would actually make a difference in the intervention of saving children right here and right now and something that we all can do today and certainly be proud of when we go home later on this week. That's why I've drafted this amendment, you know, given the parameters and restrictions that I had to deal with.

Madam Chair, let me just say that the intention of Serenity's law was to offer an avenue to call the police. Everyone knows how to contact an officer if they certainly believe that they may be or somebody may be in danger. But we cannot do that in Bill 22. Instead, I'm bringing forward this amendment to underline the responsibility of adults to contact the authorities. I want all of us here today to take pride in actually doing something, what I believe would be of really, truly concrete value, that will save the lives of children, again, here today and right now.

On December 12, 2016, when I first proposed this concept to the Premier, the Premier of this government told me that Serenity's law in the Chamber here is exactly the kind of practical idea her government was looking for to improve the child intervention system. I took that as a sign of good faith, that in a nonpartisan fashion we would do something in the common interest that would benefit the children of Alberta, which, I would say, everyone here wants to do. Bill 22 was supposed to make improvements, but in my humble opinion this falls a little bit short.

If you won't listen to me, I hope you're able to listen to the mother of this little girl, who, as my colleague has just previously pointed out, was horribly abused in the system. You know, she knows this amendment is being presented. We've contacted her. Just a short time ago she sent an e-mail saying that this would have saved her daughter. This is the type of amendment that if an adult, everyone in Alberta, was aware of the responsibility to make sure that the authorities are notified, that they cannot turn a blind eye – they cannot turn a blind eye – when a child is at risk and they know that they have to contact the authorities, there would be consequences. There would be a responsibility. She said that this would have saved her daughter. This is the type of legislation that would have saved this little girl. We know, as my colleague just pointed out, that there are so many other children in the system that are vulnerable and currently at risk. We can make it better, Madam Chair, and not just for Serenity but for others.

You know, this amendment will help children who perhaps should've been in the system but never got there because adults knew these children's lives were in danger and never notified anyone of authority. Examples that we've used in the past in this Chamber – little Alex, little Ryan, little Ezekiel – all died tragically in their homes. There are many other children out there at risk right

now who can be saved by adults today. In all those cases there were other adults who were aware that these children required immediate intervention, yet a blind eye was turned. Those adults were never held responsible. I don't think there's anyone here that would not – I certainly challenge anyone to stand up and say: no, adults do not need to be held responsible when a child is at risk. I believe that an adult has to be held responsible. These are little children that we're talking about here.

If I could just take a moment here and explain what this amendment, at least we hope, will accomplish. At this time there's a section in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act that requires adults to contact a director of child intervention if they know of a child being at risk. But as we've demonstrated in this House in previous questions in question period, it's not that easy to know how to even contact a director when a child is at risk; hence the importance of this amendment that we're trying to put forward here. In the case of Serenity and Alex and Ezekiel and Ryan other adults were aware of the dangerous plights that they were facing and should have been held legally responsible for not contacting the authorities. Far too many times in Alberta children have died in horrible circumstances that could have been prevented if an adult had only spoken up.

Madam Chair, I know there was a concern during the previous bill in regard to the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police. I had spoken to the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police. What they had had, if that makes any sense, was an old bill, an original draft, and the bill that I had presented was something that they were supportive of. It talks about a "person who has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that a child is in need of intervention shall forthwith report the matter to a director" or in this case a police officer. Although this is not exactly the same, it certainly is a variation that we can present that will still resemble what we are trying to achieve, which is to let Albertans know and adults know that it is not acceptable to turn a blind eye to a child who is at risk. It is not acceptable when a child is in need of intervention to look the other way.

Now, I promised Serenity's mother that I would never give up on seeking justice and protection for children. For the sake of this little girl, who would have been around eight years old if she had not been killed, for the sake of her surviving two children, who suffered similar horrors and are now, you know, certainly, still facing the trauma having to live through what they had gone through, and for all children, Madam Chair, who are at risk today, I and my colleagues here would like to say again that we wish that everyone in this Assembly would pass this amendment that would help children today, something that we can actually do today to ensure that adults in Alberta are made aware that they are going to be held responsible, that they cannot turn a blind eye to a child who is at risk, a child who requires intervention. It is not acceptable anywhere, and it is certainly not acceptable in the province of Alberta.

I hope we can work in a nonpartisan fashion, and I certainly encourage all members of this House to pass this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? I will see the government side and then follow with the opposition side. The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair. Having just gotten this amendment, I am right now digesting it and looking into it further and really reading into it. But I want to reference and look at some of the comments that were made by the mover of the amendment

when he talked about comments that came from the Premier in relation to practical ideas. I think that that's sort of the journey that we charted for a long time.

4:50

I want to address something, Madam Chair. This was not a New Democrat issue. It was not a PC issue. This wasn't a Social Credit or United Farmers issue. This wasn't a Liberal Party issue. This has all been created over time by successive governments in the entire history of our province, even to the day when this province was part of the Northwest Territories. The situation that we found ourselves in is as old as Confederation in some respects. This journey became something that took a very long time for us to digest, and it was really around the moment of us trying to find those practical ideas.

I want to reflect, as I look at this amendment and many of the items that have come forth to us, about the journey that we've gone on and how we've gotten here and how we've gotten to this bill and how we've talked about the context of it as well as the context of amendments that we are moving forward here, including the Member for Calgary-West's.

We all remember the day when we were talking about this in the House. We all remember the day when we struck this panel. The journey that this was was something that I couldn't fathom in 2015 when I entered politics that I would be going down. It was something that I could not fathom that I would be going down when I was announced as one of the five members of the ND caucus to serve on the panel. To try to avoid some ways to personify this, it's something that grew legs, and that was something in a very important fashion. There's something very complex, as we've talked about, in the different phases in which the recommendations of the panel has brought forth. We know that this is something that's going to take time, that we are charting courses for, that we are charting timelines in regard to it.

When it was struck, it was unique in that we had a lot of experts that were coming onto it. We did everything that we could to make sure that the elected officials could do their job to represent constituents but that we ensured that we were consulted with the expertise we needed at the table, so I want to thank Senator Laboucane-Benson, Dr. Choate, Mr. MacLaurin, and Tyler White, who joined us during this process.

First we looked at the complex needs of the reporting of the child deaths and how we reviewed them and the review process, and then as we started, we went into this process that we thought was going to be a six-month process. We had timelines approached, and at first all parties kind of went together. We looked at it, and many of us thought that it was going to be what it was going to take. But as we started to pull back the layers, we started to look at what legislation was going to be needed and what we were going to have to bring forward and whether the member's amendment was going to be needed for this.

We started to hear more and more stories. We started to hear about the complexity of what this was. We started to learn that this whole thing delved deep into reconciliation. We all talked about the number, but it was something that really hit us to heart when we first went into consultation with some of the technical briefings, when we were hearing that over 66 per cent of children who were in government care were indigenous children.

So while we wanted to make sure that we served all children of all backgrounds, we recognized that there was a disproportionate number of kids that were in government care. From there we had to look at how we addressed this. Going into the spring and into the summer, we started meeting locally with some urban indigenous groups who were doing a tremendous amount of work, who were seeing tremendous amounts of success, some with government

support, some despite government support. They were having successes, and they were having amazing stories. We were hearing first-hand from families. We were hearing first-hand from kids who were in care.

It was also a journey for us to learn, and, to be frank, I don't think we will truly completely know. We'll always be learning. This is a process that has gotten us here over the last 150 years. We started to learn about reconciliation, what that meant to our child intervention system and how initial government intervention with children through residential schools and through things like the '60s scoop got us to generational trauma and how kids who were in government care were children of other kids that were in government care and that this was a systemic problem that went generations after generations.

In that process I remember one of the most moving things that I did was when we did the blanket exercise as a panel, and I want to thank the members from the Alberta Party and the Alberta Liberal Party who did this journey with me. It was one of the most moving things I have ever done. I broke down in tears when it was over because I could not stop thinking about my own kids during this whole experience. I remember the elder came up to me and he gave me a hug and he said: we're all healing. That was very moving because I think sometimes the advice is that in our own lives and our own experiences we're always going down a journey where we're healing, whether it's trauma that we've experienced as children, stresses in our jobs, in our lives, stresses of being parents or breakdowns in certain families. Many of us go down a position in which we're healing. To be frank, as we sit here on the government bench and as members sit on the opposition bench, we all sit collectively in this Legislative Assembly. We are healing. We're healing from a problem that we have caused over time as a collective province that we need to work together as a collective province to solve.

It was very informing to go through this, and even though it was something that carried on for over a year, which was something unprecedented that we didn't expect, it was deserving for it to do so. It was something that we needed to take into serious consideration and to move forward on, and it was something that we needed to do to make sure that we addressed the systemic challenges that we saw for all kids. We had many focuses in mind, but at the end of the day the focus was about protecting the children, about protecting individual children.

One of the things that I think is addressed through some of the concerns I heard from the previous speaker is the fact that we've enhanced safety in the wording of the legislation. We made sure that we're moving some of the interpretation to make sure that the safety of the kids is paramount in the practices that our child intervention system and our workers within the system do and that as the children move through the process, they're put in the centre.

I remember when we were talking about traditional indigenous teachings, about what many different nations believed, whether some were Dene Tha' or Cree or Blackfoot, which are traditional to the province of Alberta, but many other nations that come from other areas, the Métis community as well, but also a lot of our indigenous communities that come from abroad who have chosen to settle and to live in . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member.

Mr. Sucha: . . . Calgary, whether it's in our urban settings or our rural settings.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but could you – I think maybe we could speak to the amendment.

Mr. Sucha: Yeah. Absolutely.

The Deputy Chair: Okay.

Mr. Sucha: Going into it, we've talked about, within the amendment, looking at obligations in relation to reporting. Within the reporting, as I was tying into this, we talk about the children being in the centre. It's the community as a whole that needs to discuss and communicate with each other the safety of those children, and we need to provide the resources and supports to make sure, as we're noticing challenges that exist within a community, that the community is empowered to have those processes to communicate with families and with parents, to be able to have the resources and services that they provide.

When I look into this, I'm questioning whether the reporting situations are addressed within some of the things that we've heard from the previous panel because some of the things that we heard in relation to the children being in the circle and having a child in the circle is that the community is able to collectively take care of a child. When you allow and you address cultural sensitivities and you make sure that we recognize these things that are important, does reporting become necessary when we provide the resources to put that child in the centre?

5:00

Now, I'm still digesting a lot of what we've been hearing over time. I'm always open to any conversations in relation to this.

It's also empowering. Are we addressing this within some of the extra steps that we've taken within the social work? Are we addressing this amendment and the concerns around obligations of reporting by ensuring that the social workers are properly resourced? Those are some of the things that we've heard and some of the things that we've looked into.

I know I've gone really kind of deep into the nuts and bolts of this process. I think it's something that, for every amendment that goes through this House, including the hon. Member for Calgary-West's, we have to look at and we have to give some serious consideration to, as was discussed. I look forward to hearing some more of the debate.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank the member for bringing this amendment forward and your colleagues for participating on the panel. Certainly, you know, there were some very strong recommendations that came out of that panel that, after many recommendations having sat unfulfilled on a shelf for decades, we were able to turn into an action plan, an action plan that we know is going to make a real difference for families and for children.

Certainly, in terms of the legislation and the action plan, you know, we have been able to work, thankfully, with our Child and Youth Advocate, who is a strong voice on behalf of Alberta's children, as well as Dr. Cindy Blackstock, who is clearly very well known as a strong advocate for children. Both said that they were quite impressed with the work that we're doing.

Having said that, safety is incredibly, incredibly important. Certainly, within the act we've stressed safety quite strongly. Making sure that all relevant authorities are notified is definitely something that I continue to stand behind. The act currently allows for that to happen, but, you know, again, safety for children is so important that any additional clarifying language would not be out

of order. I'm happy to support the amendment that reinforces the work that's already happening on the ground.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I rise on the amendment put forward by my colleague from Calgary-West. Let me say that it sounds like the government may support this, and I appreciate that. I don't mean to sound ungrateful, because it's a good thing that they're doing that, but we need to remember that this is short of what is Serenity's law, but it's what we thought we could fit into the legislation as it's written today.

Anything positive that will have a chance to make children more safe is a good thing. Certainly, in the committee that came to these recommendations for the legislation today, it was a battle to get there. But we did get to a place where there was a ministerial panel that we were on, and it was an all-party one, and I'm grateful for members of all sides of the House for the time that we spent together. I would agree with some of the previous speakers that the panel, in my view, operated in a nonpartisan way and worked together for the benefit of children.

I would also say that one of the biggest disappointments for me then and still today is that while there are many children in Alberta that need to be protected and looked after in the system – and the reason that we need to look at the legislation is to make sure those children can be looked after in the system, but the inspiration for the change really was Serenity's situation.

Madam Chair, I know we were asked to be careful what we say because it's before the courts, but I can assure you that I don't know anything that hasn't been in the newspaper yet. There's nothing I can talk about that hasn't been in the newspaper yet because I don't know anything that hasn't been in the newspaper yet. There is the problem: we weren't able to talk in the committee. In the committee we actually weren't even able to talk about what was in the newspaper, let alone what wasn't in the newspaper. Consequently, we haven't gotten to the place where we can say that no child will ever suffer the fate that Serenity did again.

Speaking of the media, let me just say that I've got to just take a minute here to thank now Senator Paula Simons, that actually, really did very good work to bring Serenity's case to the consciousness of Albertans, and I'm not sure how – I'm just going to give credit where it's due. Now Senator Paula Simons, then journalist Paula Simons, really deserves a lot of credit for bringing this to our attention, and it was a long journey getting to even talking about this.

I'm certainly going to support this amendment, but the fact is that no one watching or hearing this should think that this deals with everything that was material to Serenity's situation, because it does not. The ministerial panel wasn't allowed to discuss this stuff. Every time that anybody tried to raise it, it was called out of order, and we had to stop talking about it, which was a constant frustration for me and still is a frustration now and will be until whatever point in time we can actually talk about what happened there and talk about what we need to change to make sure it doesn't happen again.

The little bit I think I know from the good work of, again, primarily Senator Simons now is that Serenity was in danger, people knew about it, and no one phoned the police. So at some point I would like to get to the point even past this. Where my colleague from Calgary-West wants us to go is to get to the point where we would have in place what he calls Serenity's law, and this isn't it. It's a partial step towards it, and I thank my colleague from Calgary-West for that because I know it is the best that he could do

within the framework of the legislation that the government has presented. But I will be happier when we can come back to this place either now or under a new government or even at some point in the future and pass Serenity's law because I think we actually need to get there, where it's not just an encouragement to phone the police when a child is in danger but it's actually a requirement.

Here's the problem: when somebody gets referred to the director or the minister – and certainly I believe that the minister's intentions are good. I believe that a director's intentions are good. But the fact is, Madam Chair, that in the real world when something goes wrong to the point where a child is in danger, a child has died, a child is injured, it's human nature for people to think: wow, am I going to be in trouble? Then, of course, the human mind naturally goes to: "Well, what if nobody knew? Then maybe I won't be in trouble." While we'd hope that that will never happen, it would appear that in Serenity's case that did happen. Somebody – I don't know who or how many – knew something and didn't go to the police. Consequently, the tragic abuse that this little girl suffered continued until she was no longer alive.

5:10

I'm with my colleague from Calgary-West that I will be more satisfied when we get to the place where it's not a choice to call the police but it's an obligation. Again, while this is a positive step towards that, this doesn't get us there. This doesn't get us there.

Madam Chair, there's a lot more to talk about in this bill, and I intend to have more to say. In fact, I've got quite a bit more to say about this. But because I'm enthusiastic about this issue, I'm doing my best to restrict my remarks to the amendment, which is why I will finish speaking now and then why I will feel it necessary to get on my feet again on the main motion, because this is way too important to not talk more about. Well, I'll just say that the amendment is good, I'm going to support it, and I'll say the much more that I have to say thereafter.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to introduce an amendment on behalf of my hon. colleague the Member for Calgary-Elbow to Bill 22, An Act for Strong Families Building Stronger Communities. This amendment strengthens and reviews the provisions of this bill in section 30 by tasking a committee of stakeholders, MLAs, and all parties with the review instead of only an unspecified list of MLAs. It has been shared and revised with the minister's office.

While this amendment circulates and for the benefit of the viewers at home, I'll read the section of the bill this amendment seeks to replace.

Review

131.2(1) A special committee of the Legislative Assembly shall periodically conduct a comprehensive review of this Act.

(2) The special committee shall submit to the Legislative Assembly a report that includes any amendments recommended by the special committee within one year after the special committee starts its review.

(3) The first review must be started within 5 years after the day this section comes into force.

(4) Each subsequent review must be started within 5 years after the day the report on the previous review was required to be submitted.

Would you like me to continue as the amendment is being circulated, Madam Chair?

The Deputy Chair: Yeah. Please go ahead, hon. member. One point of clarity, sorry. You're moving it on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Elbow?

Mr. Fraser: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Your amendment is referred to as A2. Please go ahead.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you. The Member for Calgary-Elbow to move that Bill 22, An Act for Strong Families Building Stronger Communities, be amended in section 30 by striking out the proposed section 131.2 and substituting the following:

Review

131.2(1): In this section, "review committee" means the committee appointed under subsection (2).

(2): At least once every 5 years, a comprehensive review must be undertaken of this Act by a committee appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

(3) The review committee must be composed of

- (a) one or more persons representative of
 - (i) Indigenous communities,
 - (ii) guardians and caregivers of children, and
 - (iii) providers of services to children and families, and
- (b) one or more members of each caucus represented in the Legislative Assembly.

(4) The review committee must submit to the Minister a report that includes any amendments recommended by the committee within one year after commencing its review.

(5) On receiving a report under subsection (4), the Minister shall lay the report before the Legislative Assembly if it is then sitting or, if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

(6) The first review must commence within 5 years after the day this section comes into force.

(7) Each subsequent review must commence within 5 years after the day the report on the previous review was required to be submitted.

As you can see, the amendment keeps the five-year period and adds indigenous communities, guardians and caregivers, service providers, and a member of each caucus to the review committee. The amendment also requires the review to be made public. The proposed structure of the review committee itself echoes the structure of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention and will hopefully be informed by the panel's learnings.

I've heard from my colleagues in all caucuses about the impact that the panel has on their way of thinking and how we protect children in Alberta and how we work together in this House. In my own work as a paramedic in rural Alberta I've seen the devastating impact that our previous colonial practices have had on indigenous communities and families through continuing intergenerational trauma and violence. We have a responsibility to address those and many other challenges as a part of the truth and reconciliation journey. I hope this amendment can contribute to that in a sustainable way.

My colleague from Calgary-Elbow has made it clear that this province's further work to protect vulnerable children must be done in a nonpartisan way, that we cannot exploit children for political

gain. He also made it clear that the work of future Legislatures on this topic must include more representative stakeholders at the table. That's why it's important that we ensure future work to protect children proceeds in an inclusive and nonpartisan way. This amendment moves us towards that goal, and I hope all members of this House support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment A2? The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to, you know, rise in support of this amendment and say thank you to the Member for Calgary-Elbow for his dedication to his work on the panel and his strong commitment to putting politics aside on behalf of the children of this province who are a part of the child intervention system and of all of their families. This amendment is certainly a reflection of the work that he did and his commitment in that way.

As we saw through the work in the panel, the contributions of those who came as experts to the panel – those with lived experiences, those from our indigenous communities, those of the providers – proved to be truly invaluable in addressing systemic changes. Every single one of the advocates did bring to the table their own distinct voice and expertise, and they were absolutely integral in shaping our recommendations to be as positive as they were and to, in turn, turn that into an action plan that is going to make an incredible difference in the lives of children and families within this province.

I am very supportive of ensuring that these voices are heard in future reviews. I am supporting it and once again thank the member for his contribution.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow and on his behalf the hon. Member for Calgary-South East on moving this amendment. I do have a question on it. In general I think this amendment is going in the right direction and likely something that we're going to be able to support.

I don't know if the hon. Member for Calgary-South East will be able to answer this question. One of the things that the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow and other members that were on the committee, including yourself, Madam Chair, will know is that – I'm sorry; not the committee but the minister's panel on this issue – there was lots of discussion about the need for an ability to hold people accountable, to hold the system accountable, to be able to measure where we were at with things. I think that's the intent of this amendment and that many parts of it will be able to help with that. My concern, though, is that the committee that is being proposed I think would be better if it had representatives from all parties in the Assembly and it would be a bipartisan process. I just wonder if the Member for Calgary-South East agrees with that.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

5:20

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair. I absolutely do agree with that. I think that in my experience in almost close to seven years in this House, we've seen it in particular instances. Unfortunately, it all too often happens around tragedy when members of this House collaborate in earnest and do put aside the politics. I think that it is

important, not just when it's around tragedy, whether it's the wildfires or whether it's the 2013 floods or the issues that we've seen with children in care and in other important matters. I do believe that as MLAs, as private members of this House, I just honestly believe that our best work happens when we collaborate, when we get down to work and listen to one another and really try to put Albertans first instead of our own political ambitions. So, yeah, I do agree.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that honest assessment from the Member for Calgary-South East. I certainly think so as well.

One of the things that I've learned from this experience is that it's important to have that bipartisan support and bipartisan eyes on a situation of this magnitude. I think several members have spent a lot of time talking about trying to remember the path that took us to this place that we're at today, that in fact something very, very tragic happened. I think we all agree on that. I don't think that any member of this Assembly would deny the extraordinary tragedy that took place in regard to the Serenity story, which has been talked about in this Chamber many times. But there are many, many other similar stories, unfortunately, within our system that cause us to have to, you know, end up in these positions.

What I found when we went through that was that the government, while they certainly agreed that there was a tragic situation, a situation that they certainly were not responsible for – I think it's always important that as we disagree on how to handle this very tough issue, we make it clear that no member of this Assembly is responsible for what happened to Serenity. The people that did that to her are the ones that are ultimately responsible. But there is a constructive effort to block transparency on what happens with that issue. That's the experience that I had. I don't know if that was the experience that you had, Madam Chair, when you were on the minister's panel. But there was, in my mind, a blatant, constructive effort to make sure that the facts of the situation that brought us to this situation were blocked from all parties being able to see them, from everybody that was involved being able to actually have a look at the facts to be able to make determinations about what to do.

When we first started the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, we went to Government House. There was a lot of media involved at the time because of the articles from Paula Simons and Emma Graney. There was a lot of friction between the media and the ministry, which ultimately was of course split into two as a result of that. So there was a lot of media there. We had our first meeting and set our goals, set some of the parameters on how we would work through the process. We then got bogged down in days of argument with the minister – I don't think it's actually fair to say the minister because she was not there at the time – the government members of that committee actively working to make sure that the meeting could not be recorded, that there would be no records of the meeting. That went on for a very, very long time. It actually, Madam Chair, got fairly heated between the government side of the committee and the opposition side of the committee.

Now, what was interesting is that some of the external experts we had participating in that process with us ultimately helped try to bridge that gap, and we were able to finally get the meetings recorded so that people would be able to hear what was spoken about. They also could hear what we were going through, but also there would be some sort of record of the proceedings. We could

not get a *Hansard* type of thing happening no matter how much we tried. I continue to be disappointed that that happened.

Then we moved over to the Federal Building and had what would be similar to our standing committee meetings, similar to a process where we could sit and we could talk although it wouldn't have been on the record, and the people who were experts and content experts and who knew things about the situation that we were trying to address could come and sit and answer the questions. And it would be very similar, Madam Chair, to our experience, for members of the House that were not part of the ministerial panel, when you're in a standing committee of the Legislature.

Opposition members who made up that panel from the Alberta Party, the Liberal Party, at the time the PC Party, and the Wildrose Party started to ask similar questions that you would see. You would take a turn. You had a few minutes. You would ask a question of some of the experts about what was going on. I think, certainly, for us on the panel we felt that we were sent there to find out what happened to Serenity, which was a serious issue that was happening here politically. We asked the government to have an all-party panel or committee look at that situation so we'd be able to come back with solid recommendations so that what happened to Serenity could not happen to another little girl or little boy that is in our care.

So when we went there, we started to ask questions about that case. I remember – maybe the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays will recall – that we had some representatives from K Division and the Edmonton police that were there talking one day in the same room as the standing committee, and we began to ask some questions about how files were transferred. You may recall, Madam Chair, that at the time there was quite a controversy about the ministry not getting information to the proper authorities. In fact, the police at the time, according to, I believe, Paula Simons' reporting – it was possible it was Emma Graney's – were not able to get that file of information. They didn't have it. They didn't even know it was going on. In fact, they found out about the Serenity case from the news.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

When I started to ask them questions about how that worked – and actually fairly technical, not very partisan questions because I think this issue is not partisan. There were a lot of moms and dads in this room. There were a lot of aunts and uncles and grandparents and people that just want to make sure that kids are safe. I don't think that wanting to make sure that this doesn't happen to another child is a partisan issue. And so we asked them questions about how it works, how the police departments interact with the government, how a file like that could not get there, how it could be that the police didn't know about these type of documents until they read it in the newspaper, which I think was shocking to everybody, including the government members on the panel. I would imagine that they were quite taken aback by that.

What happened was immediately the chair, who, of course, belonged to the government caucus, with the support of the majority, which, of course, was the government on the committee, shut that down, and said that we could not speak about that issue and we could not ask questions about that issue. And that became a pattern of what happened during the entire panel process. The majority blocked the other parties that were trying to participate in the process from being able to get information about the very case that sent us to that place that we had committed as a group in this place to be able to try to look at to try to come up with recommendations to make sure it did not happen again.

In fact, the opposition at the time – the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, I believe, was the leader of the third party at the time. I was

happy that we got to merge and are all one party now, but he was leader of the third party at the time. I was dispatched to be the negotiator for the Wildrose Party with the government. He was negotiating on behalf of the PC Party, and we had our friend, the leader at the time, the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, of the Alberta Party. I think he was not the leader anymore, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, but he was definitely the only elected member for the Liberal Party that was in the Chamber. We all got together, and that's a wide spectrum of political thought.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I mean, that is the extreme – I don't want to say extreme, but that's the left side of the spectrum, not quite as left as the current government of the day possibly, but that's the left side of the spectrum with the Alberta Party and the Liberal Party. Then, you know, you have the conservative side of the spectrum. We all went in there and said: "Okay. How can we make this work? This is a serious issue."

At first the government continued to reject a bipartisan process to address this issue. That went on for a long time, but we finally were able to compromise and say that instead of an actual committee of the Legislature that would be on *Hansard* and would require votes on the record and would require, in our view, accountability, we were willing to compromise because of the significance of this issue, and we were going to agree to a ministerial panel as long as the opposition got to participate. And that's where we ended up. We got sent to go take on that task, and we're there. We agree to it. We're told that we'll be able to address this issue that, certainly, Madam Chair, the province of Alberta was very upset about. They're still upset about it now, but as things go on, you know, news cycles change, and that's the reality of life. Life goes on. But at the time they were very, very upset about it.

5:30

We were willing to take it out of this place into a bipartisan process, compromise, and go with the ministerial panel instead of a standing committee because we still wanted to be able to do something, but then it was repeatedly blocked. What was staggering to me, Madam Chair – and I know you'll recall this as well – is that when we had this first meeting, there was some discussion about a new process, something that I had not experienced. I don't know if the Member for Calgary-Hays had ever experienced it before. We were presented with something called a consent agenda. No, not a consent agenda. Everybody would have to consent. There would not be votes. There would not be votes where we would vote to decide if we would move something. It would be that we were going to attempt to get everybody to consent.

Mr. McIver: A consensus agenda.

Mr. Nixon: A consensus agenda. Thank you. That's the right word.

It was a consensus process. That was something new certainly for a bunch of partisan politicians on all sides to have to figure out how to navigate. We had lots of talk about how that would work and what that would look like. Some of us had some concerns that it would then bog down the process. Eventually some decisions had to be made. Some of us also had some concerns that that really just meant that, you know, certain people were not going to want to be on the record to make some of those tough decisions. Let me just stress this, Madam Chair. That was actually not part of the negotiations. That happened after we were at our first meeting, and the opposition had to agree to that. But we still wanted to move forward on an important issue, so we said that we would try to work within that process.

Then when some of the examples that I already talked about came up and we'd start to ask questions and tried to get there and we said, "Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. That's not consensus. We want to talk about this issue. We've been sent to talk about this issue," all of a sudden for those issues and those issues only there was a vote, and of course we were outvoted because we are the opposition. That's something we're used to. That's part of being the opposition. You go to a standing committee. I know you haven't been in opposition before, Madam Chair, but you will find that you get pretty used to losing votes in the opposition. You know, it doesn't make you that frustrated. It's kind of the process. The government has the majority.

It was interesting because then it was only when we tried to deal with the actual situation that brought us there that we all of a sudden went back to the process that was not the consensus agenda. It was the majority agenda. This went on to lots of conflict in the discussion, particularly actually as we got to a conversation around the publication ban. The opposition and the media that had been pushing this issue and doing a lot of good investigative work, quite frankly, on this important issue, had continued to bring up the publication ban. It's complicated. There are a lot of legal aspects to the publication ban. You're trying to balance issues of the public's right to know, the government's right to know to be able to make changes as a result of the situation, the media's right to be able to present something that often could put a face on a tragedy and actually make change but at the same time try to balance families' rights to privacy, individuals' rights to privacy in what is often the most tragic day of their lives.

I struggled a lot with that issue. At first I believed that transparency is probably the best way to go. I still believe that, but then when we sat and we listened to some of the families who had experienced that with their kids who had been lost and having to make a determination of whether their child's name would be public and would be part of the news process, for me, Madam Chair – I don't know about you – that was one of the most emotional things to watch, when parents or the people from those families came and talked about that. I mean, it became an extremely complicated thing. You recognized that it wasn't as simple as it looked just reading it in the newspaper. So we said: "Hey, we want to explore this. We feel that it's part of our mandate, and we want to go through it."

I don't know who instructed the government members on that. I don't want to say that it came from the minister's office. I can only say what the government members did on that. They again started to try to block us from being able to talk about that issue. Essentially the ministry, the very ministry that had made some mistakes along the way and that we were trying to make sure that we could give them the tools or the resources or the policy so that they would not make those mistakes again, said that that ministry would deal with it and essentially it was too complicated for us. We disagreed, and we fought back.

There was a panel meeting on the top floor of the Federal Building, another one of those nonconsensus meetings, all of a sudden. It got a little bit confusing for us, Madam Chair, because one moment it was consensus; the next thing you know it was votes. The panel, under the instruction of the chair, voted to say that we couldn't do that.

The opposition then started to raise several concerns about that. I think the media of the day was sympathetic to us on that because they had been raising it, so there were some sympathetic articles, columns on the idea that that had to be looked at. The outside experts that had participated with the partisan politicians that were part of the process ended up siding with us, and we were able to

actually outvote the government majority on the panel and able to then bring that forward, but it had to go through a lot of steps.

My point with all of this, Madam Chair, is that the government, particularly this government – it's the only government I had experience with on a panel of this nature – spent most of their time truly blocking the members who got sent there to, you know, invest time in trying to solve this. Maybe there's a reason for this that we don't understand. They spent most of their time blocking them from even being able to ask a simple question about the very little girl that caused us to have that panel. Instead they wanted us to trust the department and to trust the ministry on their own to get this right.

I think that we would have been in a much better spot right now if that had not been how the NDP chose to strong-arm that process. I think that if they had truly taken the opposition up on an open, fair conversation, publicly minuted or put into *Hansard*, allowed it to be broadcast without any argument and allowed members to ask questions about certain situations, particularly the ones that they were sent there for, we would have ended up with a lot more information. Then we actually could have come as a united group in the 29th Legislature, as a united group of MLAs and human beings from the province of Alberta that truly do not want to see something like this happen again, come forward with a clear list of recommendations. Then we could actually go back and look at the people of Alberta and say: that was a horrible situation that happened to Serenity, but here is what we learned as a result of that, and here are the things that we are going to recommend back to our colleagues inside the broader Chamber of the Legislature, and here is what we're going to pass to be able to do that.

Instead, that didn't happen. We had to come back to this Chamber and then start to ask questions about the very issue that we had been dispatched to work on as a group. It was confusing for people that were outside of the group. I remember talking to some of my colleagues, who said: "They're not telling you about this? Didn't we agree to make this panel so you could have a conversation?" In my mind what was most frustrating about that is that the minister and the Premier and the Deputy Premier would get up and answer those questions and then act as if they were telling us that information, act as if they were not blocking us from getting that information. Some of the *Hansard*, if you look back at it at that time, I found shocking.

And then you would leave after question period, and you would go back to the next panel meeting. The panel met a lot. It did lots of good work and heard from lots of people. You would go back to the panel meeting and then try to get the panel back onto the conversation and the topic that we were dispatched to deal with, and even after standing up in question period and saying, "Yeah, we're giving them all that information," basically they would leave here and not give us any of that information.

5:40

Now, I recognize that there would have been some information that was associated with the Serenity case that the minister, quite frankly, could not have talked about in a public manner. There were other mechanisms to communicate with the panel about those types of privacy issues. That could have been something that could have been negotiated between all the parties that were involved. There could have been a confidential briefing. There could have been an agreement that there were certain things that can't come out because there's some confidentiality issues with it but that here are the areas that don't have that, that you could ask questions about. Instead it was just a complete blanket of not allowed to talk about it. I don't think that most people who watched us inside this Assembly a couple of years ago, when this story first started to break, thought that when we announced that ministerial panel, an all-party

agreement to that panel, we were all going to go into a room and not even talk about the case that sent us there. I don't think most people thought that. Now you would think that we would be allowed to talk about other cases, other issues, other examples of problems in the system.

Now, remember, Madam Chair, we were sent there to try to come up with solid recommendations to make sure that in the future kids that are in the care of our government or that have an interaction with child intervention are not killed. That is what we were sent there to figure out. We were sent there to figure out how some of these terrible tragedies happened.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I was listening, of course intently, to the comments of the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I think it was very important to have somebody that had the experience of being on that panel right from the start. It was interesting hearing what he said on how things were working there. I did enjoy, of course, listening to the Member for Calgary-Hays also talk about the panel and how things went there.

I guess I find it amazing that the panel basically was set up to deal with the case of Serenity but that through the whole process they couldn't talk about Serenity. They couldn't actually talk about the case that brought about the panel's purpose. It's been said multiple times here from both sides of the House that this is a nonpartisan issue, and I agree. It's definitely nonpartisan. It's about children. It's about safety. It's about taking care of the vulnerable in our society. That's got to be our number one purpose in this. As I look at this bill and I see that it's the first of maybe multiple pieces of legislation that the government wants to bring forward, I would just hope that the first piece would be the most important piece, the one that would actually make a difference and would have made a difference for this child who is the reason that it was brought forward.

I guess I'll maybe just leave it at that for now. I do have more things to say on this issue, but I'll leave it for now and maybe ask the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre to expand a little bit more.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to speak on amendment A2? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's great to be back so quickly. As I was saying when I closed off, beyond just the Serenity case that we had been sent there to deal with, we were blocked from asking about any specific details about processes that could happen within the government about specific cases. The problem with that is: how do you identify the problems and then identify the situations that are creating those problems within the system that are ultimately causing these tragedies if you're not allowed to ask questions about how it happened?

One of the things that Paula Simons reported was that the RCMP said they needed [Serenity's mother] to sign a release to allow Alberta Health Services to release Serenity's full file. Eager to co-operate, she signed the necessary papers. Then RCMP called her with what she calls "terrible news."

Alberta Health Services said they couldn't release the records.

“They wouldn’t turn it over, not even with my signature” . . .

The province and the child welfare agency responsible for Serenity’s case failed to turn over . . .

Actually, I want to back up. I want to go to that part of the sentence. That is a great question. For that family it would’ve been a simple question: what is the reason for that? A very simple thing. We could’ve looked at: was that reasonable, or is that something that we’d be able to fix for a mother whose child was killed in our care?

The province and the child welfare agency responsible for Serenity’s case failed to turn over a key internal review of Serenity’s care to the RCMP. The Mounties only got those essential records after a public report from the child and youth advocate and a subsequent investigation by the Edmonton Journal put Serenity’s case in the public eye.

That’s actually the thing that lit the fuse to make this issue blow up into a massive political issue, and rightly so, across this province. It’s the thing that put the minister at the time under significant media pressure, and ultimately the Premier had to split his ministry into two. There are a lot of other facts that are appalling there, but that key fact is actually what started the ball rolling.

Think about that, Madam Chair.

The province and the child welfare agency responsible for Serenity’s case failed to turn over a key internal review of Serenity’s care to the RCMP.

They failed to do it. Now, why? I actually tried to ask questions about this of both the Edmonton police and the RCMP. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, I suspect, actually asked some as well. I don’t recall his offhand, but I do recall mine. I got a couple of answers about how the computer system was working. We’re starting to explore that. I would be interested to know if part of it was an IT problem. I mean, that would be a reasonable thing to be able to determine. Immediately I was shut down by the NDP chair and not allowed to ask another question about that very simple fact.

Normally, the RCMP would turn a homicide investigation . . .

These are Paula Simons’ words.

. . . over to its senior and expert major crimes unit. Instead, they kept the investigation with the local detachment. And there it remains.

Turns out, the RCMP did have many of Serenity’s medical records. But in some cases, they got photocopies of those documents from Serenity’s mom, and not from [Alberta Health Services].

A little girl was beaten, sexually abused, and starved to death. Her mother had to get some documents. She couldn’t even get them all. Alberta Health Services could not get them there. It hindered the investigation. They didn’t even know what was going on. That’s a reasonable question for that panel, that we sent to review this, to be able to ask. I still, to this day, don’t understand why we weren’t allowed to.

Paula Simons again:

More than two years later, Alberta’s medical examiner has not released Serenity’s cause of death. The Child and Youth Advocate, an independent officer of the legislature,

whom we all know,

was denied a copy of an autopsy report. The case has never been ruled a homicide. Cpl. Laurel Scott . . .

I hope I got the name right.

. . . who speaks for the RCMP in central Alberta, says an investigation is still open. Because of that, she offered no further comment.

Why did the child advocate’s report omit any reference to the genital and anal bruising, and the absent hymen, which might suggest sexual assault? Or to the hypothermia?

It’s not a fun thing to talk about, but it is a legitimate question.

We fought, and we managed to get the medical examiner to come and talk to the panel, and we started to ask some questions. What happened, Madam Chair? The NDP blocked the other political parties that were a part of the process from being able to ask the questions or at least receive the answers. I ask my colleagues that are with me in the House today: do you think that you sent us to participate in this all-party panel on behalf of Serenity’s case to not be able to ask those questions?

Again Paula Simons:

A year before her death, Serenity was at the 50th percentile for size – absolutely average. Twelve months later, her weight was so low, it’s simply not on the chart for a four-year-old girl.

How was this allowed to happen? How was it that children’s services simply gave guardianship of three children to this couple despite the allegations of abuse, then never checked up on them? How did a child starve in a province of plenty? Why, despite the horrifying medical evidence, has no one been charged with anything?

Why?

That’s what we got sent to ask. That’s what we got sent to try to find an answer to, to be able to come back here and come up with some decent recommendations to be able to change that. Not one of us in this Chamber, Madam Chair, can look each other in the eye and say that that panel accomplished that. None of us can say that that panel accomplished that. I challenge anybody in this Chamber to be able to say that they could go back to their constituents and say that we were able to solve this horrible case, this horrible situation that happened to this little girl, that this panel that we came up with solved it when you hear that we weren’t even allowed to ask questions about that.

5:50

Now, maybe it has been solved. Maybe the NDP did it behind closed doors and didn’t share it with anybody else. But that’s my point on this amendment. That’s why all parties should have an opportunity to be able to participate. I think it makes it more transparent. I don’t think that most of Alberta would know that that is what was happening behind the closed doors of the ministerial panel if it wasn’t for the fact that opposition members were there and able to come back out and say: this is what’s happening, and it’s wrong.

Paula Simons writes:

She didn’t die on [the Premier’s] watch.

I agree.

But the NDP government has done nothing to lift the secrecy that surrounds the death of children in care.

That’s the point. The panel was not allowed to talk about what went wrong with this case. But it is also about the culture of secrecy around it, about who is accountable. It was not allowed to put in mechanisms to make people accountable. It was just not allowed to do it.

Again Paula Simons:

But we’re talking about a four-year-old girl, who’d been an active toddler who loved to climb and play, a child without any documented health problems to explain why her weight had plummeted to that of a famine victim.

Why did no one notice that a child that was in our care, who had interacted with our system, went from a normal little girl, from all reports a healthy little girl with an adequate weight, all the way to a famine victim? We should be allowed to ask that question. Albertans want to know that answer. They want to know what happened. They want us to be able to come back and say: yes, this will be found out. The criminal justice system can hold people responsible from the criminal side – that’s not our responsibility – but this is what happened within our system, this is where we failed

in our system, and this is how we can make sure it never happens again.

I don't know about the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, but that's what I thought we got sent there to do. I continue to feel terrible that our panel was not allowed to be able to do that. Every time that we talk to Serenity's family, it feels terrible that we were not able to do that. I remember at the time talking to family members of Serenity and how excited they were that we were going to undertake this in a bipartisan way. And then to have to watch them watch this just turn into the story of their family member, somebody they care about, just being constantly blocked from being able to see the light of day.

Again Paula Simons:

Two years after [Serenity] was taken to hospital with a traumatic brain injury, her emaciated body covered in bruises, old and new, the Office of the Medical Examiner has yet to release an official cause of death.

Two years. Two years went by after a little girl, who our government shared some responsibility for, had such horrible things go wrong. Two years went by, and nobody still even knew the cause of death, certainly not the RCMP, we now know. Two years.

Within two months of Serenity being sent to her new home – this is again Paula Simons – child intervention services

received reports the children were bruised, scratched and malnourished. A doctor found the youngest had lost three pounds. The children's birth mother claimed the children were being denied food and were physically abused.

She asked that they be removed from the care of her family members and returned to foster care. Her request was denied.

Her request was denied even with reports, medical reports, of things that were happening to Serenity and her siblings. Her mother was saying: something is happening to my kids. Her request was denied. The next you hear, she's no longer here. She's died. She's been killed. And we're not allowed to ask how that happened.

What happened when that was reported to the doctor? Who did her mother report that to? Why did nobody act on that?

Look, I'm a simple country guy from Sundre, and that's fine, Madam Chair, but I can tell you that I can walk anywhere on main street down in Sundre right now, a great town, my hometown – I

love it – and if I tell this story to anybody else, they would say: "Why didn't somebody get in a truck after receiving that report and drive down there and find out what was happening to that little girl? Why? Why did nobody do that?" That is a fair question to have asked, again, blocked by the NDP on this committee.

Paula Simons again:

The investigation into the allegations of abuse was closed. Shortly after that – just five months after they were placed in the home – the kinship care providers were granted full guardianship of the children, and . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) we shall now rise and report progress.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 22. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Just seeing the time and the progress that we've made this afternoon, I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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