



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, October 22, 2019

Day 31

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

First Session

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 22, 2019

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, recognizing that there are many faith or not-faith backgrounds, I invite all of you to join me in a moment of quiet reflection or prayer should you choose to do so.

The prayer. Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interests and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are pleased to have two schools joining us this afternoon. I'd like to welcome St. Benedict Catholic school from Edmonton-West Henday and Vanier community Catholic school from the constituency of West Yellowhead.

Also joining us this afternoon in the galleries are guests of the Minister of Seniors and Housing: Dave and Joan Kimmel.

Also joining us in the gallery, members, are guests of the Minister of Advanced Education from the University of Calgary Students' Union: Marcus Patel, Jessica Revington, and Sadiya Nazir.

Please welcome all these members to the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Calgary-McCall has a statement to make.

Doug O'Halloran

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to rise today and pay tribute to a great man and Albertan, Doug O'Halloran. Sadly, Doug passed away on the Thanksgiving weekend after a long and intense battle with cancer. As his family, friends, and my colleagues gather to remember him in Calgary, I wanted to take this opportunity for this House to pay their respects.

Mr. Speaker, as president of the United Food and Commercial Workers union 401 Doug was a furious defender of working people's rights across Alberta and beyond. He represented 32,000 members, the largest private union in Alberta. Doug was the real deal, a leader who started on the shop floor and rose through the rank and file on the strength of his sheer tenacity and commitment. Doug simply never backed down from a fight. His most famous fight might be Lakeside Packers in 2005. After a decade of struggle and three weeks of intense job action, 2,400 meat packers had a union that would stand up for them.

Whether it was on the shop floor, at the barbecue, or on the picket lines, Doug was always there. He knew everyone, and everyone knew him. Indeed, Doug fought for the people whose fight is the hardest. He lifted up working people by fighting for a fair wage, the right to bargain, and a society that values caring for one another. In his 30 years as president he touched the lives of thousands of working families, who enjoy a higher quality of life today, and his memory lives on in the positive change he brought to their lives.

I ask the House to join me in honouring the life of this great Albertan and to take up the challenge he left for us: "I challenge you all to keep making the changes, and fighting the fights, that make the world better."

Thank you.

Health Care in Central Alberta

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, a 75-year-old constituent was admitted to Red Deer hospital for bowel surgery having not eaten for 24 hours. Staff inserted a tube to keep her stomach pumped. She could eat a little ice. For four days she waited. The hospital was in overcapacity protocol. She lost 10 pounds and much more strength and energy, already weak from previous leukemia. Recovery at 75 is slow. Overcapacity, one, puts patients in halls and tub rooms; two, sends patients home; three, sends them to other hospitals. This is the routine reality at Red Deer hospital.

For years capital spending has been egregiously underfunded, at only 20 per cent of the capital funding of other regions. For 2008 the central region received \$227 per capita while every other region received over \$1,100. Numerous AHS plans highlight the need, but nothing happens. Central AHS leaders affirm the need, but these are political decisions. For years government has taken our taxes and sent them elsewhere.

Central region patients are second-class citizens for real health care. They are 60 per cent more likely to die from heart attacks. Standards of care are, in real time, not the same as urban areas'. The number of surgeries postponed in all Alberta hospitals is .45 per cent, but Red Deer is 10 times that much, at 4 and a half plus per cent. Seventy-five per cent of Red Deer's surgeries are out of window, longer than the window of best results. This also decreases the capacity of medical professionals without the equipment or teams to function at optimal levels.

Telling central Albertans that they can get care in Edmonton when they have a heart attack or any other health issue is just wrong. Previous governments ignored the crisis of central region health care; this government must do better.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has a statement to make.

Balancing the Budget

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I was at the Mustard Seed, I remember a young girl no older than my own daughters coming in and emptying her piggy bank out. She was giving all her money to the poor. At that moment it struck me as to the gravity of our responsibility to her as a donor and to our mission.

This same philosophy has to be applied to our provincial government as we dive into budget season and discuss a plan for getting back to balance. We must also consider that we need to get value for the taxpayer and, more than that, how to value the taxpayer, how to value all citizens, recognizing that we are the stewards of their contribution. Albertans contribute so much to this province, all of them, not just the rich but everyday people, some living day to day to make ends meet. Still, at the end of the year they all fill out their tax returns and they give to the prosperity of Alberta, to be used in the best interest of Alberta.

The reality is that we need to do things differently. We want to provide quality front-line services. Simply cutting along the periphery will land us back in the same spot 10 years down the road.

Albertans from all walks of life have given so much to this province. Why? So it can be used to make sure that this is the best

place to live, raise a family, and give their neighbour a chance to live life well. We need to make sure that as we approach this budget, we consider every corner of this province – rural, urban, wealthy, poor – but more than that, we need to remember that this budget needs to be a collaboration with everyday Albertans to fulfill their dream and respect all of their contributions.

Let us be committed to an open dialogue and genuine commitment to getting Alberta back to balance, eliminating this debt, and safeguarding our children's future. And let us be the good steward that Albertans are asking us to be.

Diwali

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in the House today to mark this year's festivities for Diwali, Bandi Chhor Divas, Deepavali, and Ashok Vijaya Dashami. On October 27, 2019, families of Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist communities in Canada, India, and all across the globe will celebrate the festivals of lights.

This day is celebrated by Hindus as Diwali, which coincides with the Hindu new year, and is celebrated to honour Lord Ramachandra, the seventh avatar. It is believed that on this day Lord Ramachandra returned to his kingdom after 14 years of exile, during which he fought and won battles against the demons and the demons' king, Ravana.

Mr. Speaker, this day is also celebrated as Bandi Chhor Divas by Sikhs across the globe, which signifies the release of Sixth Guru Hargobind Singh from prison along with another 52 Hindu kings.

On the very same day, the Jain community around the world celebrates the attainment of Moksha by Mahavira.

1:40

This day is also celebrated as Ashok Vijaya Dashami by the Buddhist community as it is considered that, on this day, Emperor Ashoka was converted to Buddhism.

These celebrations symbolize the victory of light over darkness, good over evil, knowledge over ignorance, and hope over despair. During this time of reflection marked by compassion and love for the world around us, family and friends gather to light diyas, attend religious ceremonies, share meals, and exchange gifts.

In my riding of Edmonton-Meadows I will be joining many of our constituents in various temples and gurdwaras to be part of these celebrations along with my fellow caucus members. Occasions like these showcase our shared values of freedom, inclusion, equality. As Canadians we all can take a moment to celebrate.

On behalf of all New Democrats I wish everyone a joyous Diwali, Bandi Chhor Divas, Deepavali and Ashok Vijaya Dashami. Thank you.

The Speaker: A happy Diwali to you, sir, and may the light always reign.

The hon. Member for Camrose.

Daycare Subsidies

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the summer I embarked on a door-knocking campaign through the towns of my constituency of Camrose. This allowed me to thank my constituents for sending me to Edmonton and ensure that they had contact information for my office should they have need to be in touch with me.

As I door-knocked, I had many interesting conversations and met many people that I hadn't met through the previous year's campaigning. In particular, I met one gentleman who told me that he and his wife had enrolled in the \$25-per-day daycare in our community. He shared that it was a good thing for their family,

allowing them to save money. He also shared that given his profession, his family really did not need the discounted daycare, and he was sure that others in the community could have benefited much more from the subsidized daycare program. He felt guilty for taking something that his family didn't need when there were so many Albertans struggling to make ends meet in a tough economy.

Further down the street I met another constituent, who told me that their family was struggling financially. The father had lost his job in the oil field, and the family was barely getting by on just the mother's income. The pain on this woman's face was obvious, and I saw that their family was experiencing true hardship, like so many Albertans over the last four years.

I would think that if anyone should receive subsidized daycare, it should be those in true financial need. The NDP's pilot program didn't track parents' incomes or employment status and can't tell us who may really need this program. It's people who are down on their luck, struggling to pay their basic bills and need a hand up: those are the ones that need it. Unfortunately, many of these people in my riding are not able to access the \$25-per-day daycare due to the way that the pilot was set up.

I know that with careful study and consideration our Minister of Children's Services and our UCP government will ensure that our most vulnerable citizens receive the support that they deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has the call.

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the A100, a nonprofit group of investors and entrepreneurs who support the next generation of tech in our province, offered their views on what tech companies need to succeed here.

Currently over 13,000 tech companies in our province employ more than 110,000 Albertans and generate \$15.6 billion in revenue. These companies, along with developing their own products and services, are helping to create and drive efficiencies in other core industries like energy, petrochemicals, agriculture, transportation, manufacturing, and public services like health care, and they're just getting started.

What do they need to grow? Well, as the A100 notes, what makes Alberta a competitive environment for tech is different than what's required for other industries. A100 argues that we need an environment that is not only supportive but competitive with other markets, especially those in Quebec, Ontario, and B.C., to attract investors and other companies to Alberta. However, and I quote, low corporate taxes aren't sufficient. Investment tax credits are a more powerful tool to spur growth, like the Alberta investor and interactive digital media tax credits that, before being frozen by this government, leveraged \$94 million in investment in Alberta businesses. And tech needs talent: engineers, software developers, data scientists, experts in AI and machine learning, like those that could be trained in the 3,000 additional postsecondary spaces our government committed to funding.

That's what tech entrepreneurs and investors both in and outside of Alberta will be watching for in this government's first budget on Thursday. Will this government show the leadership of Peter Lougheed, who invested billions of public dollars to develop the technology to pull oil out of sand and launch our province's biggest industry, or will they simply double down on giving 4 and a half billion dollars away to big corporations and turn their backs on this opportunity to capitalize on our new raw resources and lay the foundations for another economic juggernaut, that can carry us into

a carbon-constrained future? The choice is theirs, and Albertans will be watching.

Foster and Kinship Caregiver Week

Mrs. Allard: It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to say thank you. Thank you to families that care for vulnerable children in their time of need. I rise to mark Foster and Kinship Caregiver Week and to offer my thanks to those generous Albertans across the province who provide stable and loving homes to vulnerable children and youth in care.

Mr. Speaker, as we look to the future of this province, we know that so much of it depends on supporting children, youth, and families to be strong and resilient. We want to give children the best start in life, and I am grateful for loving families that step up and say yes to caring for children and providing them with a safe home when needed, even if only for a short time. Foster and kinship caregivers in Alberta play a key role in building strong communities. They welcome children into their home and give them everything they can to help prepare them for a successful future. We know that stability is critical to a child's development, and I want to recognize these caregivers that offer stability to vulnerable children. Much is asked of them. Foster parents welcome children they've never met, and kinship caregivers welcome children they may not have known they would care for, all while working to keep children connected to their home communities and cultures.

My sister Carolyn is a teacher. Early in her career she chose to foster a young student who was in crisis. At the time, her colleagues said that she couldn't change the world, so why try? Mr. Speaker, my sister may not have changed the whole world, but she certainly changed the world for that student.

That is the power of foster and kinship caregivers, to step in and provide love, stability, support, and safety for children at a time when they need it the very most. Mr. Speaker, there is nothing more important than ensuring that children are safe and nurtured so that they can develop to their full potential and lead happy, meaningful lives.

To mark this special week and on behalf of my colleagues in this House, it is my great pleasure to express my gratitude to these kind and caring people who serve as Alberta's foster and kinship caregivers and to acknowledge the critical contribution they make to our society and especially to the children they care for.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the House will hear from the Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Elevate Aviation

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend I have the honour of attending a fundraiser put on by Elevate Aviation, an inspiring organization that works tirelessly to involve women in Canada's aviation industry by igniting passion and opening a world of possibilities. Their goal is to create a shift in the aviation industry that "promotes gender balance by connecting women with a network of support."

They have recently started a learning centre that provides unique opportunities for high school students and women to explore diverse careers in the aviation industry, from flight attendants and pilots to engineers and a career with the Canadian Armed Forces. They also provide opportunities for students and women to get behind the scenes with the Edmonton International Airport, Nav Canada, the Edmonton Flying Club, Canadian North, North Cariboo Air, and the Royal Canadian Air Force.

On top of the educational opportunities they provide, Elevate Aviation also provides four bursaries aimed at reducing barriers for women to join the aviation industry. The extensive training needed for a career in aviation takes a tremendous amount of effort and can be costly. Elevate Aviation has identified this barrier and has taken steps to make it more affordable. They have focused their resources on women that need it and therefore rely predominately on the support of volunteers to provide these services.

I would also like to give a special thank you to the incredible woman that has worked so hard to inspire so many women to join the aviation industry. Kendra Kincade, the founder of Elevate Aviation, is an inspiring community leader that continues to provide support and her experience to other women. She has made it her mission to show others the potential of a career within Canada's aviation industry and to give them a way to achieve their dreams. I look forward to continuing to support my friend and this very important organization, that work tirelessly to empower women and to educate our youth on a world of opportunity.

Thank you.

Advocacy for Alberta's Energy Industries

Mr. Loewen: Alberta has been supporting the energy needs of Canada and many other countries for generations. Canada has become a more prosperous country on the whole because of this. Because our humble, hard-working nature is part of the culture here in Alberta, we have asked for no accolades, just an opportunity to do what we do best. That's why I'm thrilled that our Premier and Minister of Energy have been working to form constructive, collaborative relationships with other Premiers as well as some of our American counterparts. These efforts, combined with our government's fight-back strategy, will help set the record straight on why Alberta oil and gas is not only integral for economic growth but also for social progress.

1:50

I want to mention another ambassador for our message, Chris Kitchen, a student from Queen's University in Ontario. Recently Queen's undergraduate student government decided to divest all of its holdings in any company that produces, transports, or dispenses fossil fuels. In response to this move Chris wrote a piece in the student newspaper about why we should instead be celebrating and encouraging oil and gas development here in Canada. He notes:

The oil and gas industry is the largest national spender in Canada on environmental protection. Many of Canada's successful clean tech projects – including research and development around solar, wind, geothermal or carbon capture technologies – are supported by oil and gas players like Enbridge, Suncor, and CNRL.

The idea that we can fix climate change by abandoning oil and gas simply isn't logically sound. Our oil and gas producers are the innovators that are going to help us address climate change, end energy poverty, and improve the quality of life for Canadians as well as others across the globe. People like Chris have the ideas and passion to implement meaningful solutions to the environmental challenges we face in concert with our oil and gas industry, not in spite of it. The first step is setting the record straight.

If federal parties, who are supposed to represent all Canadians, allow one province to veto projects crossing their territory, we descend into attitudes that hamstringing the economy at the local, provincial, and federal levels. Calm, level-headed discussion will be tossed out the window if provinces, backed by federal parties, have a veto on interprovincial projects.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has the first question.

Husky Energy Layoffs

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government rushed to give a \$4.5 billion handout to the largest and most profitable corporations in Alberta. The Premier promised that this huge giveaway would create jobs, particularly in the energy sector. Today we learned that Husky Energy is laying off Albertans. Some reports say that hundreds are out of work. Can the Premier please confirm how many people lost their jobs today and explain why your so-called plan failed them?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we sympathize with anybody who has lost their job in this province. I'm sure that this side of the House and that side of the House would agree on that. The problem is that, unfortunately, we have inherited a terrible situation from the NDP, the NDP who have worked against the oil and gas industry their entire time in office and have continued to do it in opposition. This is what we've been talking about, how important this is to the people of Alberta. Last night, when the NDP sided with their federal leader, the antipipeline, anti oil and gas NDP federal party, they sided against Albertans. It's shameful. I'm sure that the people of Husky agree. This side of the House will continue to fight for them.

Mr. Sabir: It's about people and their jobs. Husky made a quarter of a billion dollars from the Premier's handout, but it's cutting jobs, not creating them. The Premier ran on a promise to create jobs. It's been six months. There have been no jobs. In fact, the resource sector lost 13,000 jobs; that was before today's announcement. To the Premier: before you gave companies like Husky a multibillion-dollar gift, why didn't you make sure that they would use the money to actually create the jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy has the call.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What this demonstrates is a critical need for pipelines and market access. The NDP legacy on pipelines over four years was a dismal failure, that saw zero kilometres of pipelines built. What we saw under the NDP was a failed social licence and a one-and-done deal with Justin Trudeau that saw one pipeline approved, approved but not built. In return, every other pipeline was sacrificed – sacrificed – and one pipeline that was approved, the one-and-done deal, was not built. We are at a jobs crisis because of failure for four years by the NDP.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We warned this government that their corporate handout wouldn't work, but they didn't listen. They are not listening now, and Albertans in the energy sector are paying the price. Premier, Alberta workers, most of them based in my hometown of Calgary, went home from Husky today to tell their families that they lost their jobs. They are in pain. Do you have anything to offer them other than looking for scapegoats to blame for your failed corporate giveaway?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I reject the entire premise of that question. We will not be lectured by the NDP. That member was part of an NDP government in this province that oversaw the largest job loss in the history of this province, that brought us on track to \$100 billion in debt, that brought deficit after deficit after deficit, and, shockingly, that over and over sided with people that were anti

our largest industry, which is why we see the problems that we face inside this province today. This side of the House will side with Albertans just like we did yesterday, just like we will do every day going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has the second set of questions.

Premier's Travel

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The sad news from Husky we are seeing today confirms that Albertans need a full-time government with its attention focused on Alberta. Albertans will not be served by a Premier with one eye in Edmonton and one eye in Ottawa. To the Premier: will you commit to this House that you will stay here in Alberta and actually serve as a Premier for your full term?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it is so rich coming from a member whose leader, for hundreds of days, despite the opposition begging her and her cabinet to get on a plane and go down and fight the federal government on Bill C-69, sat in this Chamber and never fought for us. I'm proud to have a leader, I'm proud to have a Premier who fights each and every day for this province, whether it's in Ontario or here, fighting every day for Alberta. Their leader voted for an antipipeline leader last night in the election, voted against Albertans, stood with her socialist overlords, and stood against Alberta. Shame on them.

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess that would be: no, he's not planning on staying for his full term.

There is a lot of work to do in Alberta, a lot. As Husky prepared to lay off hundreds of workers this week, the Premier jetted off on a campaign trip to Winnipeg to stump for his federal hopefuls. We need someone here taking the wheel. This Premier promised to create jobs for Albertans, and instead we lost 27,000 and counting. To the Premier: will you commit today that you will no longer campaign in other provinces while serving as Premier regardless of what happens with our new minority government in Ottawa?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, that side of the House has a leader who voted for her leader, the NDP federal leader, who said: I am firmly opposed to the pipeline; I have been opposed to it; I will continue to fight against it, and it's absolutely one of my priorities to stop the pipeline. This side of the House will not be lectured by that side of the House, who has sided against Albertans. They sided against Albertans. They've made it clear. Shame on them. It's appalling to Albertans. It's ridiculous, their behaviour. Albertans can rest assured that this side of the House will stand with them each and every day.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I guess that would be: no, he's not going to leave Alberta.

Albertans, again, have lost 27,000 jobs and counting. The Premier needs to acknowledge that he cannot build support for our economy and our energy sector across this country by ignoring problems and waging war across Canada. Will the Premier dial back the rhetoric, stop gazing longingly at the Prime Minister's chair, and finally focus on getting real solutions for Albertans?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, you want to talk about parties and how they've acted with federal parties? That side of the House, when they were in government, made an alliance with Justin

Trudeau, an anti-Alberta alliance, one that has resulted in hundreds of thousands of Albertans losing their jobs under their watch, one that has seen our largest industry on the ropes under their watch. Those members have stood on the steps of this Legislature and protested against our largest industry, have protested against pipelines. This side of the House will not be lectured by the NDP when it comes to the oil and gas industry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the third set of questions.

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the member opposite that members of the Alberta public will be lecturing them on climate change because last night's election results clearly show that climate change is a top issue for a majority of Canadians. Alberta will be pushed to do more. Yet our Premier has done nothing but ignore the problem and put Alberta in a position of being told what to do by Ottawa. To the member opposite: why has it been more than six months and we still haven't seen any action on climate change?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, looking forward to tabling TIER here in a few days, as I've said inside this House – but I think that hon. member misses the point. His federal party received less votes in this federal election in this province than Justin Trudeau's party did in this province. Conservatives in this province received the highest mandate in the history of this country in this province last night. Do you know why that is? Because Conservatives have stood up for Albertans. That side of the House, the NDP, have stood against Albertans. They've worked against Albertans. They've laughed at Albertans. They've called them Chicken Little. They told them to take the bus, and they called them embarrassing cousins. Shame on them.

2:00

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is running out of time to deal on climate change, and we can't waste it listening to the rhetoric from the member opposite. The fact is that our Premier has slashed Alberta's plan to fight climate change, and now we're going to get Justin Trudeau's plan. We've been waiting over six months for action on climate change. We only had to wait a few days for a 4 and a half billion dollar handout to the most profitable corporations in this province. Wouldn't it have been better to use that \$4.5 billion to actually fight climate change?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we now know that the NDP's climate plan only raised taxes and had no impact on climate. I look forward to releasing our plan in a couple of weeks.

But back to jobs, that hon. member was a cabinet minister in a government whose Energy minister told Albertans who were out of jobs that maybe they should move to B.C. for the time being to look for jobs. Again, this side of the House will not be lectured by the NDP. They've been outright rejected by Albertans. They were rejected again last night. Albertans want a party that will stand up for them. Their government will stand up for this province each and every day. The NDP, the Official Opposition, will sell 'em out every time they get.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, it's only been six months, and they've already lost 27,000 jobs. The member opposite couldn't create a job if he were given a job-creation kit for Christmas. Our government's plan cut carbon emissions by 50 megatonnes, created thousands of jobs, and funded green infrastructure investments all across the

province. It was the leading plan in Canada. This government's action so far is only to troll those who want action on climate change. When will you release your plan, and will it come even close to the emissions targets Alberta has to meet?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, their leader already admitted that they did nothing on emission targets. It's ridiculous. Again, we will not be lectured by that member, who was a cabinet minister in the worst government in the history of this province, that oversaw the largest job loss . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: . . . in the history of this province, that brought us on track to a hundred billion dollars in debt in this province, that chased away billions of dollars of investment under their watch, Mr. Speaker. It's rich for them to continue to lecture us inside this House, particularly when we know they continue to side with their eastern socialist overlords. They side with them against Albertans. When are they going to side with Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the last set of leader questions.

Municipal Funding

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Municipal Affairs has written a column in today's *Calgary Herald* and *Edmonton Journal* deeming spending in Alberta's big cities unsustainable. It would appear this column is an attempt by the minister to carry out his plan to cut funding for municipal infrastructure. The Premier's own blue-ribbon report calls for up to 20 per cent in cuts. To the Premier: how exactly is cutting infrastructure for Edmonton and Calgary going to help residents of those cities?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs is rising to answer.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Let me be clear. You know, in this province we saw for the last four years the devastation that the members opposite brought to our province. On this side at the provincial level we are working so hard to undo the extreme damage they have done to our communities, not-for-profits, businesses, and families. That is exactly what we are focused on, and that's what we are going to deliver later this week.

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you. The city of Calgary still has serious infrastructure needs, including the Springbank dam and the green line. When we ask about these projects, the Premier dodges the question. That's probably because the climate leadership plan that he ended was going to pay for these major projects. To the Premier: can you promise here and now to Calgarians that the green line and the Springbank dam will be built on the timeline set out by our government and that you won't force the cities to hike taxes to pay for these projects?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, we've already been through this with that hon. member. That hon. member knows it because she was part of a cabinet who messed up filing documents with the federal regulator when it comes to Springbank. The reality is that we're in this situation and conversation when it comes to Springbank because the NDP failed yet again when they were in power. This is a mistake that they made. Our government continues to move forward for solutions that will work

for Albertans. Again, it's rich coming from the NDP, who make mistake after mistake after mistake and then come and ask questions about what's taking so long to fix their mistakes.

Ms Ganley: Yet another dodge. I wonder if Calgarians will ever hear an answer.

The Premier continues to talk out of both sides of his mouth, and he's not alone. The Minister of Justice claims that he will add 500 more police to Alberta municipalities, counties, districts, and villages, but he's offered no specifics on how to do that. Meanwhile his own officials are distributing documents that talk about a 70 per cent cut for rural police funding. To the Minister of Justice: rather than asking me to do your job, as you've done for days, can you please own your role as minister and explain how you will pay for these 500 police officers?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we've had these lines of questions here. My record on that is clear. What we have here is a member opposite who wouldn't accept an invitation to come to Rocky Mountain House to hear about their legacy on rural crime, wouldn't accept when I offered to pay their transportation costs. Here is an offer for all the members opposite, Mr. Speaker. I am proposing to rent a bus. It's going to have on the side of that bus: NDP legacy tour on rural crime. I invite them to come on down. I've met with thousands of Albertans. I've had 5,000 responses online. Why won't they own up to their record on rural crime?

Condominium Owner Consumer Protection

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Fort McMurray are dealing with significant issues regarding condominiums. For example, last fall I told the story of a man who purchased a condo in Fort McMurray in the Penhorwood complex. Due to discovery of faulty construction he, alongside 167 other units, was evacuated in 2011. Mortgages are still being paid on these units even though they were demolished several years ago. Every time these issues crop up, investor confidence in the housing industry drops. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what is your ministry doing to prevent these issues from occurring again?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As the Penhorwood complex issues came to light, the government developed and implemented a new-home warranty protection act, which was later expanded to require that residential builders, including condominium builders, be licensed. We are also working with national code bodies and industry to ensure that Alberta's codes are up to date and reflect best practices. My heart goes out to these residents, and I am working to ensure that we don't see a repeat of this situation.

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past a few condos, both in Fort McMurray and across the province, have had serious construction concerns. Most condo boards do good work, but they're not used to overseeing large rebuilds, which they're not prepared for nor designed to manage. Now my constituents are telling me about a condo complex which has no condo board but is managed by the builder even though multiple people own units within this complex. These issues have occurred even as previous governments updated the associated legislation and regulations. To the Minister of Service Alberta: how will this government ensure adequate legal protection for the buyers of condominiums?

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I cannot comment on any specifics, I am happy to provide some information to the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. First of all, let me just say that as a former condo resident and as a former condo board member I understand the pressures that boards face, and I cannot imagine what it would be like to oversee a rebuild. Second, I would like to clarify that according to current legislation, a board must be set up within 90 days once 50 per cent of the titles have been delivered to owners. Finally, I would encourage all condo owners and those who are looking at buying a condo to check out some of the materials we have online, including a tipsheet called *Owning a Condominium*.

Thank you.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, private consumer protection companies have stepped up to protect Fort McMurray residents where previous governments left my constituents unappeased. These same companies have told me that they are, quote, uncovering the largest failure in consumer protection that they have ever heard of; the scale is almost not believable. End quote. This is a multibillion-dollar industry in our province alone. To the Minister of Service Alberta: what will your ministry do to ensure that Albertans, especially those dealing with the largest purchasing decision of their lives, are sufficiently protected?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for continuing to raise these concerns with me and with my department. He's doing great advocacy on behalf of his constituents. You know, our government provides numerous resources to help Albertans protect themselves as best they can and to provide them information on things they should be looking for before buying a product or hiring a service. I previously mentioned a condo owner tipsheet that we have available online, and in addition to that we also have other consumer protection resources that offer information to consumers before they buy or hire. If consumers have a specific complaint, they can file that complaint online, and our consumer investigation unit will look into the matter further.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has the call.

2:10

Diagnostic Imaging Wait Times

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, recently I've been approached by many Albertans whose doctors have determined they need diagnostic imaging but find themselves facing wait times of up to seven to nine months even for cases marked urgent. CT scans and MRIs are essential tools to diagnose life-threatening illnesses like cancer. The longer a patient has to wait for that scan, the less likely they are to survive. These delays started recently, as in this past summer, so what did this Minister of Health do or what did he fail to do that created this backlog that is putting Albertans' lives at risk?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, for four years we saw wait times get longer and longer under the NDP government, and they did nothing. It's one of the many reasons that Albertans voted them out of office in the last election. Our CT and MRI wait times are longer than the national average along with many surgery waits as well. We have to do better given how much we spend here in Alberta on our health care. The previous minister claimed that she had intervened last year to fix wait times for CT scans and cataract

surgery as well. The result was that the wait for CT scans went up, and the wait for cataract surgery soared from 39 weeks to 48.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that an Alberta Health Services spokesman told me just last week that this backlog is the direct result of this minister allowing imaging funding from the previous government to expire and given that this government somehow was able to move with lightning speed to give 4 and a half billion dollars away in a corporate handout, to this minister: are you content to leave Alberta families living with cancer to simply wait and worry as long as they get their diagnosis in due course?

Mr. Shandro: I see a theme in a lot of the questions that I get in this House, Mr. Speaker: why in five months have you not fixed what we couldn't do in four years? It's a ridiculous question. I reject the premise. We are going to fix the problems that the NDP left us in health care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that this choice of corporate handouts over health care comes alongside this minister's ongoing gross mismanagement of Alberta's lab testing systems and given that I've met with Albertans whose lives are truly at stake as this government allows medical scans and tests to fall behind, to this Minister of Health: why did you pick your no-jobs corporate handout over the safety and health of Albertans with cancer?

Mr. Shandro: What an irresponsible thing to continue to be said in this House, Mr. Speaker, these imaginary numbers that keep on being given out by our friends opposite, imaginary numbers about 4.5 this, or 4.5 that. The fact is that 95 per cent of the corporations where I come from in Calgary are small businesses. These are families who have invested their family money in those businesses. This job-creation tax cut will help them, help them be able to hire back their neighbours and help them reinvest in those businesses.

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

Health Care Funding

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has spent this fall session avoiding giving any details about their closed-door budget, Albertans are growing increasingly concerned about what services will get cut to pay for their 4 and a half billion dollar corporate giveaway. We know that the chair of the blue-ribbon panel shut down over 50 rural hospitals in Saskatchewan in 1993 as a cost-saving measure. Apparently, saving lives in Saskatchewan wasn't worth the money. To the Minister of Infrastructure: will your budget put a dollar sign on the lives of Albertans, and if so, how many dollars will each life save?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, obviously, we're rolling out a budget the day after tomorrow, so I'm not going to reveal details today. What I can reveal and this House knows is that the previous government left us on an unsustainable trajectory in the way they managed the finances of this province. The members opposite ran the province's finances into the ground, and ultimately we were elected to deliver a budget that responds responsibly for the financial management of the province.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm looking forward to seeing how much every single life is worth on Thursday, then.

Now, given that in 2009 when reflecting on the closure of those over 50 rural hospitals, the chair of the blue-ribbon panel acknowledged that the savings from closing these hospitals was, quote, far less than what was expected and given, Mr. Speaker, that I would hope that all members of this House would agree that compromising health care for rural Albertans for a pittance in savings isn't worth it, again to the Minister of Infrastructure: since there is no business or moral case to closing hospitals, will you commit to keeping every single rural Alberta hospital open after the budget?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, what I can say is that the previous government's financial management would have resulted in the next generation having no hospitals at all. They were putting us on a trajectory where we simply could not operate sustainably. Expenses were rising; revenues were flat. In spite of the fact that they were raising taxes, they were collecting less. Why? Because investment fled the province, jobs with it, and, ultimately, government revenues. We will turn that around.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess Albertans will just have to wait and see how many hospitals will be closed.

Now, given that this Health minister has yet to lay out a clear plan for maintaining quality and accessible health care for all Albertans and given that the UCP are taking advice from someone who closed 52 rural hospitals for very little savings and given that protecting health care access for Albertans should be a no-brainer for every member of this House, to the Minister of Health: since the Minister of Finance will not give a clear answer or the Minister of Infrastructure, will you commit that not a single rural hospital will close while you are the minister?

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-South, I concur; I'm sure that Albertans are looking forward to the budget on Thursday. However, that was a preamble, and they're not to be used.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, our campaign commitment to Albertans was to maintain or increase health care funding. That was our health care guarantee to Albertans. We're looking forward to being able to fulfill that commitment. We do have a plan. We're going to be providing the details for this plan on how we're going to bring down wait times for surgeries through our surgical initiative. We're incredibly proud of the many initiatives that we're already unleashing. The nurse practitioner initiative as well is expanding the scope of LPNs in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Tourism Strategy

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the 2019 election platform the UCP committed to developing a 10-year tourism strategy due to the high potential for economic diversification within the already burgeoning tourism sector. It ambitiously targeted doubling tourism spending in our province by 2030. To the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism: can you share with us your government's progress and reference the co-operation and collaboration you are developing between your ministry and industry partners in pursuit of this goal?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Tourism is an industry that we are going to be working very hard to unchain in order to reach its full potential. We have already taken measures to free up red tape in the tourism sector through my colleague the Minister of Environment and Parks. As was in our platform, our government will be developing a 10-year tourism strategy in order to fully unleash our tourism potential.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you to the minister. It's good to see progress on yet another platform commitment as we have on so many others.

Given the minister's insights on growth potential in the tourism sector beyond the traditional attraction of our magnificent Rockies and given the boundless experiential tourism assets across our great province, will the minister share with Albertans some of the specific goals and diverse offerings that reflect growth opportunities within the 10-year strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. It is true that many areas of Alberta have great potential for tourism, including the Rockies, but also areas such as the badlands. The 10-year tourism strategy will be a comprehensive and innovative framework that will contain recommendations and strategies that will help communities to grow tourism. The strategy will furthermore have a very robust and ambitious target for tourism investment.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Minister. Given the importance of the 10-year strategy in growing tourism in Alberta and given that it will require not only ideas but a depth of sectoral and marketing experience and given that it is also clear that our province has both the talent and entrepreneurial mindset in the field of tourism that can be engaged in developing this strategy, including some within our own government, can the minister please share with us who will be leading this all-important initiative for growth in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. A bold strategy like the one we're developing requires an experienced and innovative leader. Travel Alberta, among others, will be one of the driving forces in the development of the 10-year tourism strategy, and we will be consulting far and wide across the province on ways to reduce red tape, grow the tourism sector, and bring private-sector tourism investment to our province.

2:20 Reproductive Health Care Access

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the UCP caucus voted unanimously against a motion that would have urged the government to take steps to ensure equal access to reproductive health care services in the province of Alberta. Firstly, I'd like to acknowledge the government members for staying in the Chamber while the motion was debated, which is a refreshing change from the mass exodus last time the topic was discussed. To the Minister of Health: can you please explain to this House why you didn't support this motion? After all, it is your job to provide accessible health care to all Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, of course, it's sometimes difficult for members to comment on the decisions that have already been made

by the Assembly, but if the minister of status of women would like to do so, she may.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, our government has done some incredible work, and thank you very much to the Minister of Health for improving rural access. That includes adding 30 new nurse practitioners, expanding the scope of practice of 16,000 LPNs. This is a very important issue, and we just can't understand why the NDP is using this to create divisiveness in this House. That plan failed. We refuse to use these issues, women's issues especially, as a political football in this House.

Ms Renaud: Given that instead of sincerely engaging in the debate, the government chose to diminish the concerns of women and health care professionals and given that this government has no problem funding \$4.5 billion for its no-jobs corporate handout but can't commit to supporting women's access to health care, to the Minister of Health: can you explain to the concerned women and health care providers what it takes for the government to respect their issues?

The Speaker: The minister for the status of women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it very interesting that this member would mention that when they had four years to bring this forward if this was a necessity, especially when you're talking about rural care, rural health care, and women's issues in rural health care. We had the opportunity to discuss this. My door is always open. If you want to have a legitimate discussion about this and a bipartisan discussion, please come to me. This is very important to this caucus.

Thank you.

Ms Renaud: Given that the government and all members have an obligation to ensure that all Albertans have equal access to reproductive health care under the law and given that we've heard stories of the difficulties faced by Albertans, especially those living in rural, remote areas when it comes to being able to access abortion and reproductive health care services, to the Minister of Health: can you please explain to all of us in this House why people living in rural, remote communities get less when it comes to reproductive health care?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister for the status of women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that's a question that she needs to ask her caucus and the Leader of the Opposition because if it actually mattered, maybe all of their members would have shown up to vote last night. On top of that, more than that, there is an opportunity to discuss – again I bring up that the Minister of Health has done an excellent job looking into rural care, looking into those matters, and making sure that there is access for these services wherever they are needed.

I bring up again that if the previous government was interested in these issues, they would have brought them up earlier and would have made this legislation a priority while they were in government.

The Speaker: The hon. minister for the status of women will know that we rarely refer to the absence or the presence of members. While you didn't do that specifically, I might just add caution when speaking about who may or may not have voted in the House.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Bill 203

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's priorities are showing. They took immediate action to give away \$4.5 billion

to corporations and created zero jobs in the process. But when faced with debating the bill and the importance of protecting the public health care system, this government won't even allow it to come into the Legislature. To the Minister of Health: do you reject public health care, are you scared of it, or can you just not afford it after the Premier kicked billions of dollars to big corporations?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, again we hear these imaginary numbers from our friends opposite. They make stuff up. They're trying to create fear among Albertans.

We have a public health care guarantee. We are guaranteeing Albertans that we will maintain or increase our funding in this public health care system.

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

Mr. Feehan: Your guarantees aren't worth the cardboard they're written on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government voted against even debating a bill that stakeholders told the committee would ban extra-billing for insured services in our health care system and given that this minister, with all of his non answers today, appears dead set on moving to an American-style health care model, where people will pay for service and those that can't afford it get the shaft, to the Minister of Health: just how high will you let people's health care bills go as you scramble to pay for your corporate giveaway?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, American-style this, American-style that: we keep hearing that from our friends opposite. We spend world-class amounts of money in our health care system in Alberta, and Albertans expect world-class outcomes. That means comparing us to Scotland, Sweden, England, and Australia and not, as our friends opposite would have us do, comparing us to Cuba.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Bill 203 would have also taken action to ban queue-jumping in our health care system and given that Bill 203 would also have banned the introduction of two-tiered medicine, to the Minister of Health: won't you admit that the corporate CEOs you're kicking handouts to will also get pushed to the front of the line?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, again more fear and more smear among our friends opposite in trying to scare people. We have a guarantee to Albertans that we will continue to maintain or increase our funding of the publicly funded health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has a question.

Rural Housing and High-speed Internet

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our rural areas, particularly in my constituency, are looking for support. Rent is becoming unaffordable for many, and our Internet connectivity and coverage needs some serious work. Many mobile-home communities in my area have landlords that are not being reasonable. They are increasing lot rents while not delivering services that are required such as snow removal. To the Minister of Service Alberta: can you please inform this House of your plans to make residential tenancy dispute resolution systems also available for residents of mobile-home communities so that they, too, can have this service?

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. I want to also thank him for organizing the opportunity for me to come and visit with some of his constituents in a mobile-home community in Parkland. It was very helpful for me to hear directly from the mobile-home community residents and just to listen to their concerns and meet with them in their homes. That's why the tour that I did as Minister of Service Alberta this summer was so important. I toured across 36 communities in nine days, 4,200 kilometres, and I met with residents all across this province to discuss these kinds of issues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that rural Internet is lagging behind, quite literally, in comparison to what many cities in Alberta enjoy and given that the Internet is a major form of communication not only for households but for businesses as well and given that the quality of Internet access is essential for businesses when considering where to invest, can the minister please update this House on the plans to facilitate high-quality Internet service in rural areas?

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to my colleague here. To talk about the tour I did this summer and the discussions I had with his constituents and many others across this province, the fact is that the previous government promised a broadband strategy several times but failed to deliver. We know this is important, and that's why I spent so much time this summer speaking with so many municipalities and regional economic development associations as well as private industry and telecommunications companies to get a good, firm understanding of what the status of this industry is and how we can work with them to go over some results for rural Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that this minister has previously stated that we cannot afford to overbuild the infrastructure when it comes to ensuring high-speed Internet access and given that he has spoken regularly about the need to engage with other levels of government as well as large and small businesses and stakeholders in order to find solutions, can the minister please explain to us the work that he is undertaking to ensure that there is a co-ordination of efforts to solve this problem in the sharing of information between municipalities and others around the infrastructure that already exists?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. You know, the most important thing here is that we need to take the time to do this right. We need to make sure that we're all pulling in the same direction and we're all working from the same information. That's, again, why the summer tour was so important. That's why the meetings I've been having since with telecommunications companies as well as with municipalities and with regional economic development associations are so important. It's important that we understand the issues on the ground in these rural communities because not all of them are facing the same challenges and constraints and it can't be a one-size-fits-all solution. I'm pleased to say that I had a great meeting with Telus just this week, and I'm looking forward to having some more meetings in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has a question.

2:30

Support for Seniors

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've spent this summer and fall meeting with seniors and seniors' groups across Alberta. I can inform this House that the minister of seniors has created a high level of fear and uncertainty by failing to provide assurances that vital services will be protected from cuts. To the minister: can you promise Alberta seniors that they won't be forced to pay for your government's \$4.5 billion corporate handout?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government's election platform included a commitment to make life better for seniors and their families, maintaining the existing seniors' benefits, and we take that commitment seriously. However, our government must also get spending under control, or we will endanger future programs and services for those who need it the most such as our seniors.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that these agencies co-ordinate a large number of volunteers that provide high-quality care and support at a modest price to the provincial government and given that this support allows Alberta seniors to remain in their homes and communities and to live in dignity, to the minister again: will you put these seniors' minds at ease right now and say clearly that their supports will not be cut?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government must get spending under control. Seniors have made our province into what it is today, but they also understand that we need to live within our means. The MacKinnon report indicated that if we continue down this path of spending, we will soon be more than a hundred billion dollars in debt. We are spending \$5 million a day on interest instead. Five million dollars is enough to buy 30 ambulances each day.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like seniors are going to be left behind by this government.

Given that seniors' agencies provide preventative services that help keep Alberta seniors from needing costly ambulance trips and stays in the emergency room and given that we know seniors' health declines rapidly when they're forced to leave their homes and communities for care, to the minister. Your job is to stand up for seniors in cabinet. Why can't you put their fears to rest now and support funding for seniors' programs?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Pon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government got us into this trouble. The NDP has repeatedly failed our seniors. For four unsuccessful years the NDP did not address the needs of our seniors. By 2035 one in five Albertans will be over the age of 65. Our government will ensure that our most cherished residents have the support they need.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has another question.

Seclusion Rooms in Schools

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this Legislature today I attended a rally with parents that are very concerned about the use of seclusion rooms in Alberta schools. Our government banned these rooms, and we were going to work with school boards on proper funding and supports to see the ban through. But this current Minister of Education ended that ban, and now the use of seclusion rooms is rising. To the minister: do you really think it's okay to lock away a student with complex needs rather than helping them succeed?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Nobody wants to use these seclusion rooms, but we also recognize that exceptional circumstances need to be considered from time to time. Numerous education partners, including the ATA, have called on us to rethink the NDP's ban, and we owe it to our staff and to students to ensure that schools remain safe work and productive learning environments.

Ms Renaud: Given that over 700 uses by Edmonton public isn't time to time and given that one person at a budget town hall held in St. Albert was asked to build an additional 200 seclusion rooms and given that this minister appears fully willing to sit on her hands while kids are locked up in seclusion rooms, to this minister: how do you justify putting teachers and students in harm's way by condoning seclusion rooms? Simple question. Now we need an answer.

Member LaGrange: I totally reject the premise of that comment. The example that she gave is a clear example of why we require strict standards and reporting processes, that the previous government failed to implement. We have brought together all these key partners, including the ATA and Inclusion Alberta, to the table to help finalize these standards, and they will be coming forward very, very soon.

Ms Renaud: Given that the parents I spoke to at today's rally were not consulted on the upcoming budget, which is no surprise given that you have to be a UCP donor to have a say, and given that the Finance minister has indicated that there will be no increase in education funding despite the student population growing, to either minister. You didn't attend the rally, so here's your chance. Please explain to these parents why you think that having a student locked away in a seclusion room is okay, is justifiable, and that corporate handouts are okay. I will table the proof so that you can have a look at it.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Again, I reiterate the fact that nobody wants these seclusion rooms used. They are there to be used for the safety of the students and the staff. At the end of the day, school divisions are the ones in the best position to make these decisions. I will not micromanage school boards as the previous ministry did.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has a question.

Alberta Energy Regulator

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a recent report from the Auditor General we see that it cites inappropriate use of

public money by the Alberta Energy Regulator. It also states that the AER was operating “outside of its mandate.” We’ve received additional reports from the Ethics Commissioner and the Public Interest Commissioner offering a scathing indictment of the activities of leaders within the Alberta Energy Regulator over the past few years. To the minister of environment: what is being done to change the tone from the top within our regulator?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was shocked to see the boondoggle that was the NDP’s mismanagement of the Alberta Energy Regulator when I was appointed as environment minister. It was described by the *Edmonton Journal*, after reading those investigations that the hon. member refers to, as Damning Investigations into AER Show NDP Was Asleep at the Pump Jack. I can assure you that is what it looks like. The NDP were asleep at the wheel at the very time that the energy industry needed them most, which is why the hon. Energy minister and I have taken action right away. We replaced the Alberta Energy Regulator board, and we started a review into the mandate, the governance, and the overall process within the Alberta Energy Regulator.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer and your leadership on this. I’m very happy to see accountability for taxpayers there. Given that it has emerged that some within the AER were more concerned with side projects like ICORE and enhancing their own profiles than they were with the core function of the regulator, to the minister: how did this happen, and how is this government working to ensure that the Alberta Energy Regulator is adhering to their core mandate?

The Speaker: I know that there may be a certain amount of admiration between the two of you, but I would still consider that to be a preamble.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it was shocking to look through the reports and find out what a mess was taking place under the NDP’s watch when it came to the Alberta Energy Regulator. It’s very serious, an abuse of taxpayer dollars, and completely inappropriate behaviour, that this side of the House condemns. As such, we first replaced the board of the Alberta Energy Regulator. We also started a review both into the mandate and the governance of the Alberta Energy Regulator, which is taking place now, as well as a review into the overall operations of the Alberta Energy Regulator, with the goal of making sure that we have the best regulator in the world that maintains our oil and gas industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that in the last few years we have seen the regulator’s well approval time increase to among one of the longest in North America, which is shameful, to the minister: what is this government doing to improve efficiency to enhance this province’s competitive advantage in terms of our oil and gas industry?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, sadly, Mr. Speaker, under the NDP we know now what was taking place at the Alberta Energy Regulator. They were not taking our energy industry seriously, and they were focused on everything but the energy industry and making sure that it was working. As we go through this review process, the overall goal, as we pointed out in our platform, is to make sure that we have the best regulator, that is efficient and able to do the work that we

need to do with the oil and gas industry, while still maintaining the best environmental standards in the world. The Minister of Energy and I are confident that we’re going to be able to achieve that through the review process.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has caught my eye.

2:40

Red Tape Reduction

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the last two years Alberta’s NDP was given an F, a failing grade, in red tape from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. We are the only province to get that failing grade in Canada, the same failing grade I give to the Leader of the Opposition for betraying Alberta and voting for Jagmeet Singh.

Ms Sweet: Point of order.

Mr. Schow: To the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction: how will this government address the heavy presence of red tape in all sectors of Alberta’s economy?

The Speaker: The point of order is noted at 2:40.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question, and the truth is that the CFIB did actually give this government an F, but in reality who gave them the F is the businesses, the job creators, the innovators of Alberta. Those are the ones who spoke loud and clear on April 16 and said: “No more. We want to have a better, more efficient way to be able to go forward.” This is why this government has approached this red tape reduction initiative in a way that we will be able to make sure we get Albertans back to work and jumpstart our economy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the CFIB stated that regulations cost the average business \$6,700 per employee and given that the NDP voting decisions from their leader could cost us national unity and given that the cost of red tape is especially burdensome for small businesses across Alberta, can the associate minister please explain how this government will meet its red tape reduction targets of one-third to reduce unnecessary red tape causing burdens on Alberta businesses?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, President Reagan once said while describing socialist governments: “If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it.” Well, that pretty much sums up the NDP’s four years in government. However, on this side of the House what we’re going to do is that we’re going to do something different. We recognize that businesses are actually the solution to the problem. We do not want to demonize them and make them feel like they’re not an important part of the solution, so we’re going to make sure that we free up their wings to be able to do what they do best, soar, and make sure that they get up there and do the jobs that they need to do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the public sector is notorious for higher levels of red tape in areas such as municipalities, schools, universities, and other public-sector organizations and given that the NDP is notorious for not defending Alberta, can the associate minister please explain how this government will reach its red tape reduction targets, thereby allowing

public sectors to focus on service delivery rather than cumbersome administration?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important point. What I would say is that within the public sector we have high-performing people that want to be able to actually get our job creators and free up our job creators and our innovators to do what they do best: create jobs. We know that it's not the role and responsibility of the government to do that, so we need to make sure that our public sector, the people who actually provide those application forms in a timely fashion, can do that in an efficient and effective way. What we're going to do is make sure that they have the best tools to be able to do this in the most effective and responsible way.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will proceed with the rest of the daily Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has a tabling.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make two tablings today. I have the requisite number of copies of letters submitted to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills, one from the Alberta Medical Association and the other from the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings today? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have the five copies. From the Smithsonian it's a blast from the past under the Harper government: Canadian Scientists Explain Exactly How Their Government Silenced Science.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings today?

Hon. members, we are at points of order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand on a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j), making false allegations against a member, imputing false or unavowed motives to another member, using abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder. In the last question we just heard the hon. member mention that the Leader of the Official Opposition did a betrayal to Albertans by voting in the federal election.

I would just like to remind all members of the House that although the members may not be very happy with the outcome of the federal election, there was an actual NDP member that was elected to the caucus within the federal jurisdiction in Alberta. So before you start saying that the leader betrayed Albertans by voting, I think you should take some reflection back on the fact that you're actually talking to a good percentage of Albertans within that constituency.

Again, using the language that she is a betrayer of Albertans is completely unparliamentary, and it is not a dispute of the facts. So I would ask the member to please withdraw and maybe rethink what language we use in this House.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, first, a point of clarification. I believe the hon. deputy House leader rose on two points of order. I think this is the later one. Maybe there's something else going on which you have under control. That seems to be what you're

indicating to me, as always. Thank you. I just wanted to make sure I was on the right point of order.

Mr. Speaker, in regard to the issue raised by the hon. member, I want to be clear that I do not have the Blues – I know that you do – but I do have the hon. member's notes, and he says: the same failing grade I give to the Leader of the Opposition for betraying Albertans for giving Singh her vote. The reality is that the hon. deputy House leader wants to refer to the 11 per cent of Albertans who voted for the NPD, and they're welcome to do that, but today in the House that hon. member is rising on the over 70 per cent of Albertans who voted for a pro-energy party and are still shocked that the Leader of the Official Opposition would support somebody who's trying to block energy development, trying to block pipelines inside our province, and has repeatedly stood with people that are attacking our province. If that's not a betrayal of this province, I don't know what is. But at the end of the day, what this is, clearly, is a matter of debate on whether or not that is a betrayal of the province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members, for your interjections and your submissions. I think what we have here is a difference of opinion on what may or may not have happened as it relates to the federal election and how individuals may or may not have cast their ballots. I think that's best left up to Albertans. As such, this is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

On the point of order that was indicated at 2:02, that point of order has been withdrawn, so we are at the end of points of order.

Having said that, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford would like to make a statement.

Imputing Motives

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know you ruled on a comment I made yesterday,* but having had a chance to review *Hansard*, I feel it's important to correct the record. They've indicated that I did say something that was unparliamentary. I ask that it be withdrawn, and I apologize to the House.

The Speaker: Thank you very much to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

Interprovincial Infrastructure Projects

34. Mrs. Savage moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon: Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly denounce all federal political parties that would enable a provincial government to unilaterally prevent the construction of interprovincial infrastructure projects of national importance, including natural resource pipelines.

Ms Hoffman moved on behalf of Mr. Bilous that the motion be amended by adding "and that would roll back progress on efforts to reach Canada's current greenhouse gas emissions targets, including the abysmal federal TIER plan" after the words "prevent the construction of interprovincial infrastructure projects of national importance, including natural resource pipelines."

[Debate adjourned on the amendment October 17]

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I rise to continue debate on this motion, with particular reference to the profound implications of yesterday's federal general election. Earlier today I spoke with the

*See page 1870, right column, paragraph 5

Prime Minister and congratulated him on his government's re-election. Albertans are democrats, and I have always said that we will work with any federal government to advance the interests of this great province. I was also clear with the Prime Minister that yesterday we saw the largest democratic mandate in the history of Alberta for a federal party, with nearly 70 per cent of Albertans voting for the Conservative Party of Canada, the same party that won a plurality of votes across the country in yesterday's election. I told the Prime Minister that behind those numbers lies a profound sense of alienation that must be taken very seriously.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, many Albertans feel betrayed. We have been proud Canadians throughout our history, always willing to defend our country and its values. For decades we have been the great engine of jobs and prosperity for the entire country, contributing over \$600 billion more to the rest of Canada than we have received back from Ottawa over the past six decades. Even in tough times, with Albertans losing their jobs in recent years, with many losing their homes, and many having lost their hope, we have still contributed \$20 billion a year more to Ottawa than we have received back. That wealth, generated by the blessings of our natural resources and the innovation and hard work of Albertans, has helped to build schools and hospitals from coast to coast.

We have been an economic refuge for Canadians struggling with poverty and unemployment, who for decades have moved to this land of opportunity to enjoy the dignity of work. We have been the great engine of middle-class job growth, of upward social mobility, of social progress. It is here that indigenous Canadians have experienced by far the highest levels of employment and income across Canada. The pensions and savings of Canadians from coast to coast have depended in large part on the resources that we develop here responsibly.

Yet despite all of that, Albertans feel like everywhere we turn, we are being blocked in, pinned down, and even attacked within our own country for what we do to contribute to it. We are tired – we are tired – of politicians demanding that Albertans pay the bills while at the same time undermining our ability to generate the wealth that we share across the country.

It was this federal government, Mr. Speaker, that killed the Northern Gateway and Energy East pipelines, that surrendered to a veto on the Keystone XL pipeline, and that has brought in the no-more-pipelines law and the tanker ban that attacks a product produced in only one of Canada's 10 provinces, Alberta. In this campaign Mr. Trudeau openly campaigned in Quebec against what he called *les grands pétroliers* Albertains, the big Alberta oil companies.

Mr. Speaker, can you imagine a Prime Minister or a leader of any Canadian political party openly attacking Ontario's auto sector or Quebec's aviation industry? The idea itself is unthinkable and rightfully so. In fact, to the contrary, the federal government is eager to subsidize both industries, that produce major CO₂ emissions.

Mr. Speaker, in this new Parliament the Prime Minister will likely depend on the support of minor parties that were even more openly hostile to the workers and resources that have heated our homes, energized our economy, created hundreds of thousands of jobs, and raised living standards from coast to coast. In fact, 4 of the 5 main federal parties campaigned on allowing provincial governments to violate the clear letter of the Constitution under section 92 by seeking to give provinces the ability to block interprovincial pipelines, which are, under section 92 of the Constitution Act, the exclusive authority of the national government, even though 12 of the 13 provincial and territorial

Premiers have expressed their support at the Council of the Federation for energy and resource corridors across the federation.

As I said recently, what a strange world in which we live, where we had 4 of 5 federal parties seeking to give up federal power over major nation-building, job-creating interprovincial infrastructure but 12 of the 13 provinces saying they recognize that that is federal authority.

At least 3 of the 5 federal parties, including the Trudeau Liberals, supported Bill C-69's gross federal intrusion into our own exclusive provincial jurisdiction to regulate the production of our energy. Let me pause to restate what I said on this last week, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta's consent to the 1982 Constitution Act was predicated on the adoption of section 92A of the Constitution, which assigns to this Legislature and the other provincial Legislatures exclusively the power to regulate the production of natural resources, including our oil and gas. So what we saw in this federal campaign that ended last night from most of the federal parties, including that which won, was a complete inversion of the letter, the vision, and the spirit of the Canadian Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, what Albertans said in unprecedented numbers with their ballots yesterday is that they want to respect the Constitution of Canada. They want an economic union where provinces have the right, as Peter Lougheed fought for, to develop their own resources and the federal government has the responsibility to get those resources to markets. That is why Albertans in record numbers, joined by our friends in Saskatchewan and most of western Canada, spoke with one loud voice of defiance last night. Albertans in all of their diversity spoke out, urban and rural, young and old. Indigenous Albertans, the descendants of pioneers, and the newest Albertans spoke with their votes yesterday to say to the Prime Minister and to our fellow Canadians that we demand fairness, we demand respect, we demand the right to responsibly develop the resources and the wealth on which our whole country depends, and we demand that the Constitution of Canada be respected with its original vision of this federation as an economic union.

Mr. Speaker, last night the Prime Minister said to Canadians in Alberta and Saskatchewan, quote: I've heard your frustration, and I want to be there to support you. Unquote. Well, those are fine words, but if we are to avoid real, lasting damage to the unity and prosperity of this federation, they must be more than words. They must be followed by real action that demonstrates a commitment to fairness in this federation.

Mr. Speaker, to the Prime Minister, with whom I spoke earlier today, in congratulating him on his re-election, I made this plain. If you want to support us, then you must support us to get our oil and gas to international markets, support us as we reduce our emissions as well so that we can have the cleanest oil and gas industry in the world. Alberta's number one strategic economic imperative must be getting our energy to global markets, and there is nothing more important for that than the successful, rapid completion of the Trans Mountain expansion project.

It is important to remember, Mr. Speaker, that over two-thirds of Canadians voted yesterday for parties that support the expansion of Trans Mountain and that collectively those parties hold, I understand, 278 seats in the House of Commons. Therefore, I call now publicly on Prime Minister Trudeau, as I did earlier today in person. I call upon him not to make any deals or arrangements with either the NDP, the separatist Bloc Québécois, or the explicitly anti-Alberta Green Party that would endanger progress on the Trans Mountain pipeline, a project that Canadians support consistently in public opinion polls by a margin of 2 to 1, as do our friends in British Columbia. This is the first measure of good faith from this federal government.

I have sent a five-page letter to the Prime Minister this afternoon, which I will table for members to review, outlining other concrete steps that this federal government could take to demonstrate goodwill to the people of Alberta, who spoke with such a loud voice yesterday. Many of these ideas were included in this government's election platform, our blueprint for positive change for Albertans, including the many ideas we articulated for a fair deal for Alberta in the Canadian federation, including embracing resource corridors.

I underscore, Mr. Speaker, that this is a concept that is not a parochial interest of this province but, rather, has been endorsed, in fact, in principle by all 13 provincial and territorial governments, and 12 of those governments explicitly support the notion that resource and energy corridors ought to include oil and gas pipelines. I repeat: this is not a unique or special request of the government or people of Alberta. This is about nation building. This is about being partners in prosperity. This concept is about achieving the dream of the economic union embedded in the Constitution.

3:00

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, our fight for fairness demands fundamental reform to the equalization program embedded in section 36 of the Constitution. It is fundamentally unfair to expect the working women and men of Alberta, even at a time of prolonged economic decline and stagnation, to be the overwhelming contributors to the entire system of fiscal federalism with a net annual contribution of \$20 billion a year.

That is why the federation created something called the fiscal stabilization program, which is supposed to provide a fiscal offset from the central government when a have province like Alberta faces a sudden and unexpected decline in its revenues, as we did in 2015 and beyond. Now, had that program operated without caps, Alberta would have received \$1.6 billion in 2015 to recognize the precipitous decline in our revenues. Instead, it has been capped at \$60 per person, meaning that we only received \$250 million, which was a fraction of the multibillion-dollar revenue decline which in part drove this province into a deep deficit. So we also demand reform of the fiscal stabilization program.

Mr. Speaker, it is unacceptable to Albertans that they see provinces who refuse to develop their own natural resources, as we do so well here in the province, effectively being subsidized for that poor policy choice by increases in equalization payments. That is why we will press vigorously for fundamental equalization reform.

Let me restate our election commitment. If we do not see substantial progress towards or completion of the Trans Mountain expansion and if we do not see laws that prejudicially attack our vital economic interests repealed or substantially amended, such as Bill C-69, the no-more-pipelines law, this Alberta government will put on the ballot, in the form of a constitutional referendum, the principle of equalization by seeking the approval of the people of Alberta to delete section 36, equalization, from the Canadian Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, we do not say that lightly, nor do we say it with a lack of generosity. We Albertans have demonstrated our deep generosity to our fellow Canadians. We are proud to have been able to contribute over \$600 billion to the rest of the federation in recent decades. But what we will no longer abide are governments, politicians in other parts of the country, including Ottawa, demanding that we pay the freight while refusing to allow us to develop the wealth that we then transfer through those equalization and other transfer programs. All we ask for here is fairness, the fairness to be able to develop those resources, the wealth from which we can then share with the rest of the country.

That is what I called for the night that we were elected as a government, which was for us to be partners in prosperity. That is

all Albertans are asking for. The frustration that we hear from our constituents, the voice with which they spoke last night, is a plea fundamentally for fairness, and that is what we will fight for without relent.

Mr. Speaker, further in our fight for a fair deal I've renewed in this letter to the Prime Minister our call for the national government to exempt Alberta from the damaging impact of the stress test, imposed on homebuyers by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, designed specifically to address overheated realty markets in Toronto and Vancouver but which has had, as Ottawa policies too often do, the consequence of damaging this province during a prolonged period of economic stagnation. It's not fair, and we demand its repeal. I raised this with the Prime Minister in person three days after having been sworn in, and we will be seeking like-minded provinces, such as Saskatchewan, to join us in this renewed demand.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to press for the federal government to listen to 9 of the 10 provinces and the vast majority of members of the Canadian Senate in reconsidering the devastating consequences of the no-more-pipelines law, Bill C-69. I can tell you, having spoken to major global investors, that this bill, recently proclaimed, has created massive investor uncertainty. A strong Canada needs a strong Alberta, and a strong Alberta needs a strong resource sector, and that requires investor confidence. This bill has shaken that confidence, in addition to so many other policies. Again, in this letter and in the measures that we will be taking in the months to come, we will demand a fundamental rethink of that legislation. If the Prime Minister is sincere in what he said last night about understanding the frustration of the western provinces, then one way that he could demonstrate that in good faith is to listen not just to Alberta but 9 of the 10 provinces in suspending or delaying the application of Bill C-69 and going back and reconsidering amendments that were even proposed by the former New Democrat government here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, these are some of the measures outlined in the platform upon which this government ran, but we do not think that they are sufficient – they may be necessary in our fight for fairness, but they are not sufficient – so for that reason, in the days to come, I will be announcing the creation of a panel of eminent Albertans tasked with the job of consulting broadly amongst Albertans on other ways in which we can secure our role and fairness in the Canadian federation. There are many ideas that have been offered by grassroots Albertans, by policy experts, by academics, and others, and this government will pursue and give serious consideration to every one of those ideas in a consultation process between now and the end of this calendar year and come back to Albertans early in 2020 with an expanded plan to fight for fairness in the federation.

Mr. Speaker, let me close by saying that for those Albertans who feel frustrated and angry as a result of last night's election, I and, I know, the members of this government share and feel that frustration. For those who have lost so much of their incomes, of their life savings, in many cases their homes, in some cases their families, we understand the adversity through which they have gone and, in many cases, continue to go. I want those Albertans to understand that they have, in this provincial government, leadership that is determined to do everything within our power to secure a fair deal for them so that once again they can play a role as leaders in this federation and enjoy the promise of opportunity that Alberta has always represented. I want to encourage those Albertans to understand that they have friends and allies across this country, that on most of the issues to which I have just spoken, the vast majority of Canadian provincial governments side with Alberta.

3:10

Indeed, on the critical strategic issue of building a coastal pipeline, last night 278 Members of Parliament were elected on platforms to build the Trans Mountain pipeline. We intend to hold this federal government to its word in that respect as we seek, Mr. Speaker, in the months and years to come, to do everything within our power to defend the vital interests of this province, which has played such a magnificent role as builders, as doers, as dreamers, as creators of opportunity and shared prosperity. That is the Alberta of which we are all proud, and together, united, we Albertans must fight for that Alberta in the future.

Thank you.

I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 16

Public Lands Modernization (Grazing Leases and Obsolete Provisions) Amendment Act, 2019

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and talk on third reading of bill C-16. Sorry; not C-16. The Premier's comments got me thinking of federal bills just a moment ago. I'll go with Bill 16, in regard to grazing leases. We have talked about this important piece of legislation in this House at length over the last few days. I am excited to see it in third reading, and I do hope that we have an opportunity to pass it off to Her Honour to be able to give it royal assent here as early as this week.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The reality is that this is a historical piece of legislation on which we've been able to get unanimous consent from every grazing association and ranching association inside this province to be able to modernize our grazing rates inside this province, something that has been in place, Mr. Speaker, shockingly, since the late 1950s, when the formula was created, and implemented in the 1960s and then was frozen in the 1990s.

It has been in that position for a long time, creating problems for the industry. You would think that holding the grazing rates at a low level would not create problems for the industry, but it has in a couple of ways. The first and the most important way is that it's put them at risk of a countervail suit, trade sanctions, against what is an important industry. I do understand, Mr. Speaker, that sometimes the members opposite don't fully understand the importance of agriculture to our community, to our province, but when you see the realities that we're facing right now with our largest industry, I think it should always continue to remind us how much we depend on our second-largest industry, which is the agriculture industry.

The second is that it's actually created a situation financewise within the province of Alberta where we haven't been able to get Albertans fair rates for renting grass, which in turn has resulted in the government not being able, sometimes, to fulfill their commitments when it comes to grazing leases, Mr. Speaker. That's the other component of this important piece of legislation. It ends up with a dedicated revenue source of 30 per cent of the increase in revenue from raising rentals, that ends up going into a dedicated revenue fund that will help us meet our objectives when it comes to our environmental responsibilities with grazing leases.

Then the third and most important part, in some ways, of this legislation is that it deals with the transfer fees when you transfer

grazing leases amongst people. Often those are families transferring them to the next generation of the agriculture community, who are then going to go and use those grazing leases to produce cattle in the Canadian cattle market, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes those transfer fees have been as high as \$25,000 or higher, just to transfer a grazing lease from one generation to another. This will enshrine in legislation that the fee will be \$3,150 going forward, which is a significant saving, as we begin to encourage the next generation to be able to participate in the agriculture community in raising cattle. I think that's exciting. One of the biggest things that we need to do is to continue to encourage the next generation to participate in the agriculture industry, and this will help deal with that.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, this piece of legislation shows that there is a new approach, when it comes to the agriculture industry, from Alberta's current government. There is an approach where we will work collaboratively to find solutions to problems. This is a problem that has existed for a while. Granted, it goes back to the former Progressive Conservative government and further back, but it was a problem that the NDP had ample opportunity to be able to try to address. In fact, stakeholder groups went to them and often asked, but the NDP ignored them, like they did with agriculture so much.

Our Premier and our government, Alberta's government, have a different approach when it comes to that, and this is a great illustration of it. We're willing to go in a room, find solutions together for a problem that was impacting an industry, which will ultimately protect that industry and allow them to be able to create jobs and economic growth inside our province.

I'm excited about that, Mr. Speaker, and I do hope that all hon. members support that going forward and that we recognize today, with this legislation, the importance of our cattle industry not just to Alberta but to this country and that we show solidarity with them in being able to implement this legislation into law in the province of Alberta to secure that important industry going forward for generations to come.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, prior to moving forward with any other members looking to speak, with the changeover of Speakers I just wanted to confirm with the hon. Government House Leader that he's moving third reading.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a bit chaotic there for a moment, but I'm most definitely moving third reading.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, looking for anyone else looking to speak, I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise to speak to this important piece of legislation that will be a very positive effect for our grazing lease operators. The minister is correct. Indeed, this is an issue that's been talked about through so many different governments, going back to, I would say, even the Social Credit days. However, this is a continuation of work that our government had started, and we appreciate the government continuing the work we were doing. It shows, definitely, that our government and this government can work hand in hand to determine that the economic development that we wish to proceed with and the environmental stewardship that we wish to guide our work with can go hand in hand.

We hope that the government continues to monitor the situation, but we know that the grazing lease operators are in support of this. We're happy to lend our support, and I encourage all members in the House to support this important legislation. It changes the grazing lease rental rates for cattle grazing throughout the province.

They were based on a market formula. Now, they had been low, and that was part of the concern of the grazing lease operators, that they were at risk of trade sanctions as a result of action that might be taken by U.S. competitors. It moves the formula and other parts out of the legislation, that can be changed by ministerial order. The additional flexibility, hopefully, will make it easier to keep the legislation up to date.

As many members will know, about 14 per cent of Alberta forage is from land with grazing leases, and it's an important part of our cattle industry. Bringing it up to date and moving it out of the realm of the risk of trade sanctions was an important piece of work that we were beginning to do in our term as government, and we're pleased to see the government continuing with this piece of legislation today.

We're in a position, I believe, to support it. When the government is doing something positive, especially when it concerns our second-largest industry in Alberta, we certainly want to get behind it. We encourage all members to support this legislation to make sure that our cattle are chewing grass in a healthy way for decades to come.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to third reading? I see the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, it's my pleasure to speak to Bill 16. The importance of this bill is that it relates to the farmers and ranchers in Alberta and, of course, deals with the grazing reserves that they have and the care that they take for that land. I know one thing for sure is that those people take a lot of pride in their grazing leases, and they manage them well. They take care of them well because it's in their best interest, but of course it's in the best interest of Albertans to have this land taken care of in such a manner.

I think one thing we need to do is that we need to know that these fees will balance the need to be globally competitive and, of course, the need of Albertans to get their fair share for the use of public land. I think the key to this, Mr. Speaker, is to have that kind of balance. Of course, this is public land, and Albertans deserve to get their fair share from the use of that land, and we do need to make sure that our farming and ranching industries are protected, that they can be competitive on a global scale.

3:20

Now, I think these new fees will better align with land values and make sure that ranchers benefit from any market fluctuations. I think that what we've seen, especially recently, are market fluctuations and how things outside of our control affect the markets in our agriculture industry. We've seen issues with China and canola, of course. That's something that's kind of at the forefront in our minds right now in the agriculture industry, how national and international situations affect the market for our agricultural producers right here in Alberta. In fact, situations like that can be devastating to our agriculture industry. I think that what's key for this bill is being able to take those things into consideration as they go forward so that we know that our farmers and ranchers are protected and we have an opportunity to adjust things so that we can make sure that they can stay in business and be competitive also on the global scale.

Now, of course, the government has worked closely with farmers and ranchers to develop this new fee structure. One thing that's for certain is that it has broad support from the grazing associations. In fact, over the past four and a half to five years I've met with the grazing associations multiple times, and this was their number one

concern, to get this situation fixed. You know, these rates haven't been changed since 1994, and I think there was a lot of angst amongst them as far as getting this straightened out to make sure that we didn't have any problems with trade because of rates that maybe some might view as unfair. I know that they expressed some frustration with the last four years, where they really wanted to have this taken care of and it hadn't happened. Of course, within five months here now we're delivering this to them, and I think that's something that they're happy to have. Like I say, there's been widespread support for this from the grazing associations.

Now, by modernizing the fee framework, this will also help reduce red tape. Of course, when I speak to farmers and ranchers, a lot of times the only thing they ask for is to get government out of their way so they can just do what they do best, which is raise crops and raise cattle and other livestock. It seems like a lot of times government regulation is interfering in what they want to do and how they want to do it. Of course, we always have to have some regulation – some regulation is needed – but there's a lot of regulation that basically interferes with farmers and ranchers in their ability to move forward and do what they do. The other thing is that that red tape takes away from their competitiveness. Of course, we're an export industry when it comes to ag products and ranching products, so we need to reduce that red tape, reduce that burden from regulation that doesn't help the ag producer but, in fact, hinders the ag producer from being able to be competitive on a global scale.

As I've mentioned, these current rental rates have been frozen since 1994. Of course, I think that, in fact, probably around 1994, you know, the farming and ranching industry was having a hard time, so at that time they were thinking: well, okay; we won't adjust the rates now. But what happens is that the longer you go on, the worse the situation gets as far as making sure that it looks fair for Albertans as far as a return on the benefit of public land and also as far as a competitiveness situation when it comes to trade stability so that other jurisdictions can't accuse us of unfairly subsidizing our ag products.

The government is now ready to implement this new framework. Again, this will ensure that trade stability that the farmers and ranchers desire and that they also need. They need this in order to move forward. There are always organizations that would love to take some of our market share away from us. They're always looking for an excuse, and we don't need to give these organizations any excuses to take away from our market share, because we know that we have the best products right here in Alberta. Obviously, we're known world-wide for our beef, and when it comes to grazing leases, that's what we're doing on those grazing leases, raising cattle, raising beef.

Of course, around the world we're known for high-quality beef. I know that in my business previous to this a lot of my clients have come here, and they love our Alberta beef. They really do. You know, a lot of times when travelling, you'll have a steak somewhere, and you'll say: "That's a steak. Fine. Whatever." But when they come here and taste our Alberta beef, they make special note of that, of the quality and the taste. Of course, I think that's something that we can be proud of, and we want to be able to keep that pride. We need to be able to keep that opportunity to export our beef around the world and help benefit our economy both in Alberta and across Canada, too.

I think that this will help create dedicated funding because a portion of this rental revenue will be used to support rangeland sustainability initiatives. Of course, obviously, the cattle industry and the beef industry want to see this. They want to see their rangeland sustained over long periods of time. They don't want to do anything to damage this rangeland and these grazing leases.

They want to be proactive with this investment so that they can be assured that there will be a long-term benefit from their being able to use these grazing leases.

Now, another thing this bill does is that it reflects the geographic differences and their impacts on the beef production across the province. Of course, Alberta is very diverse as far as its geography when you look from the north to the south. In the south it's mostly prairie land. I've spent some time in the last week or so down there, on some of the grazing leases in southern Alberta. It's beautiful country down there, of course, but they don't have, like, the trees that we have in northern Alberta growing up through the fences and that kind of maintenance that it takes to keep the trees cut down. As soon as you clear any land in northern Alberta, if you're not constantly actively farming it and tilling the soil and everything, then immediately the trees just start growing up again. Those trees grow fast. The willows come first, then the poplars, and that hurts the fence quality, the ability for fences to keep cattle in. Along with that are the mature trees that are around. You have a big wind come through, and all of a sudden all of these trees are blowing down on the fences.

In fact, last weekend, when I had a chance to get out into the woods a little bit, I travelled around a grazing lease, and on the fenceline there were literally hundreds of trees that had fallen right across the fence. They were hard to manoeuvre around. I know that the rancher for that grazing lease is going to have to take a four-wheeler out there and physically use a chainsaw and literally cut all of those large trees off that fence in order to have his cows stay inside that fence. When we look at things like that, it's obvious that these geographic differences are important to consider when it comes to grazing leases.

Another thing, of course, between the north and the south is the length of the season that you're allowed to have your cattle on the grazing lease. It's longer in the south because it's warmer and there's a longer growing season. It's a little shorter in the north. These are things that need to be reflected in regulation, and that bill will do this, too.

Now, this bill also helps address demographic issues in the ranching industry by providing rental rates that are responsive to market conditions and reducing financial barriers to new producers entering the cattle industry by implementing a flat-rate assignment fee. Mr. Speaker, what happens is that when you buy and sell a grazing lease, there's an assignment fee that's associated with transferring that grazing lease from one person to another. Of course, we need to make sure that these assignment fees are reasonable and don't hinder the opportunity for somebody to sell their grazing lease to another rancher that needs it. We also don't want to hinder the rancher from buying by having excessive fees that will hinder that sale and that opportunity for that grazing lease to be used efficiently and effectively by the people that want to.

Of course, there's also an issue with transfer fees when it comes to passing on a grazing lease from one generation to another, when transferring a grazing lease from one person to the next generation within the same family. That's why it's so important to be looking at these assignment fees and making sure that they're reasonable and acceptable and don't hinder the opportunity for grazing lease holders to pass them on.

3:30

Now, we also wanted to create management efficiencies and align the act and regulations to current business practices and operations. When we look at the management of the grazing leases, of course, I think one thing that's been frustrating in the past is the length of time it takes to transfer a grazing lease from one person to another. I just talked about the fees associated with transferring a

grazing lease, but there's also a timeline. Of course, when you buy a grazing lease, there's the legal paperwork and the bank paperwork to transfer title and transfer the finances back and forth between the buyer and seller, but the government has a part, too, to play to transfer that grazing lease from one person to the next. That situation itself has been, I think, somewhat frustrating for some grazing lease holders as they've had to wait an excessive amount of time for that transfer of ownership.

What happens is that once it's sold and the decision is made and the money is transferred to the lawyers, then all of a sudden there's a time of limbo waiting for the government to actually do that work to transfer those grazing leases over. That alone can create, I guess, a lot of angst, too, within the industry as far as what happens to that grazing lease while it's in limbo between the buyer and the seller. Who's responsible for it? Who's responsible for the fees? Can the person that's going to buy it put cattle on it yet, or is it still the other person's to use even though they wanted to sell it? There are situations like that that have come out, and I think that this bill and this kind of realization that something needed to be done about grazing leases in Alberta will be very helpful to the ranchers in Alberta as far as being able to do their business in a manner that's both effective and efficient and makes sense on a business scale.

We've got to realize, too, that as much as ranching and farming is a way of life and what some Albertans do generation after generation — families that farm and ranch just tend to continue doing that — it's also a business, and we need to treat it as such. When they're involved in this operation and they're working hours and hours and hours with this business of ranching and farming, in the end they need to have a profit. It needs to make sense. Any kind of encumbrances that the government throws in the way are something that hinder that development and their ability to do business and support their families in the way that they choose.

Of course, this bill will help maintain market access. I guess I've talked about that a bit already, how there are groups outside of Alberta that would love to see the market share of Alberta farmers and ranchers diminished so that they could take advantage of it. They will often use the smallest little things to be able to break into the market, so we need to keep those out. We need to keep those people at bay so that we can maintain the market access for our agriculture products which, of course, we know are the best in the world. Again, we talk about the dependable funding for rangeland sustainability initiatives. All these things are important for this bill and why this bill is so important.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you to the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

We are now at the stage where 29(2)(a) is available should any members wish to make any quick questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there any members looking to speak? I see the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has caught my eye.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to be able to rise today to speak to Bill 16, Public Lands Modernization (Grazing Leases and Obsolete Provisions) Amendment Act, 2019. You don't have to live in Alberta very long to realize that farmers and ranchers are a vital part of the Alberta economy and of Alberta life in general. I can say that my roots come from a ranching and farming background and that it was and is still almost a part of the birthright of the Smith family. I live in a constituency that proudly has the Cowboy Trail run through it, and I have grown up hearing stories of many of the families in Alberta as they have come in and they have immigrated into this province, have homesteaded, and have started their farms and their ranches. I can remember talking

with John Bronson, who talked about a great-uncle that came up in the mid 1800s, driving cattle all the way from Texas all the way into northern Alberta, and he still had the bullwhip that his great uncle used as he was driving those cattle up into Alberta.

Well, that may be our history, but it is also time to address and to modernize and to update the framework for our grazing dispositions in Alberta. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to see that we're part of a government that has done the consultation and has the support of all of the major grazing stakeholders, that we have done the job properly, that these people have come to us and have said, "This is what we need. This is what we desire," and we have been able to fulfill the needs of this very important industry in the province of Alberta. Not to put too fine a point on it, but there is a certain amount of pride, when we bring Bill 16 before this House, that it has the support of those stakeholders, unlike the previous government when it seemed to bring forward bills like Bill 6.

Mr. Speaker, ranchers and neighbours are our friends, and ranchers and agricultural workers and farmers are our friends and they are our neighbours. This bill is a reflection of the life that they bring into this province. Bill 16 reflects the important difference in ranching and agriculture by geography, that what happens in grazing leases in the north is very different than what is necessarily needed in the south. There are, absolutely, two grazing zones in this province, and this bill is reflective of the north and the south. We know that ranching in High Level is very different from ranching in Lethbridge, so this Bill 16 is a reflection of those differences and addresses them.

We know that portions of the revenue that is generated from this bill are going to be used for environmental sustainability and stewardship. We know and ranchers know across this province that this is an industry that must last for generations, that we have a responsibility to the land and to manage that land and to do so in such a fashion that it will produce not only food but wealth as we move forward into the future of this province. This will provide funds for research and for land management. It will provide and invest in wetlands and grassland ecosystems to ensure that we have a growing ranching economy moving into the future. This will help to create an industry that is environmentally sustainable, and we are proud to be able to partner with this industry, our second-largest industry in this province.

Mr. Speaker, our world is rapidly modernizing. You know, I can remember. I had a great-grandmother that I got to know very well. She was born in the 1890s. She lived to be well over 100, and when she moved to western Canada, she moved into a province that didn't have roads. She lived in a world where the Wright brothers had not flown the first airplane. She did not have a telephone on the farm. We have changed. We are modernized. Unfortunately, much of our grazing leases and how we obtain revenue from it has not modernized. Today we have farmers that are air seeding, and I went to a sale of cattle for a cousin last year, and it was being done through the Internet and through video. Ranching has modernized. We see that much of the feedstock, many of the cattle that we have today – we've cut and reduced the methane emissions significantly simply by addressing the feed that we give our cattle.

3:40

So we need to modernize the fee framework for our public lands and for our grazing lands. We need to update these regulatory frameworks, and we need to make sure that they reflect the current economic reality of the industry that we depend upon here in Alberta. These rates were frozen and have been frozen for over 25 years, Mr. Speaker, and it's time to update. It's time to use market-based rental rates that will reduce the chances of trade retaliation from the United States. We depend on export in this market. We

depend on having the capacity to export our beef into the United States, so it's important that we make sure that our grazing rates and leases are not going to be open to a challenge from the United States, which could damage this industry.

Our government has been able to move on this because our government has actually met and listened to the stakeholders in this industry. We're happy to be able to see in those conversations and in meeting with these people that we have met the needs that they have given to us, and I know that they're very happy with the openness of this government. I know that, for instance, when the minister of agriculture came to my constituency, my constituents were very impressed with his capacity to understand the issues that they were bringing to his attention and his willingness to listen and to move on those issues. I know and we can see again that the major stakeholders here are supporting this modernizing of the grazing leases because of the leadership of the Minister of Environment and Parks. We're very pleased to be able to see and to be able to move forward on this piece of legislation.

Our farmers and ranchers are critical to the Alberta economy. This industry helps to feed not only Alberta but Canada and indeed the rest of the world, and this industry has the capacity to continue to grow and to continue to feed Alberta and Canada and the rest of the world. This bill will increase the capacity for us to trade and to feed the nations of the world and to do it, Mr. Speaker, in a sustainable way.

We have had many ranchers and farmers in our caucus that have been able to make sure that, as we bring forward these pieces of legislation, they give their feedback to this. We know and I know that in this caucus we have advocated for these constituents, for our ranchers and our farmers, and we will continue to do so as the United Conservative government.

This act, Mr. Speaker, will provide the stability and the predictability that is going to be needed for our ranching economy. It's going to ensure that we are not faced with unreasonable trade sanctions, it's going to address red tape, and it's going to provide a profitability that will allow our farmers to move forward, confident that they can address the needs of society and create a sound business platform.

I am very pleased to be able to speak today to Bill 16 and to give it my wholehearted support. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody wish to take that opportunity.

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West – Lethbridge-East. My apologies. Go ahead.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll have to get a pin that says that possibly.

It is my pleasure to rise in the House today and speak to Bill 16, Public Lands Modernization (Grazing Leases and Obsolete Provisions) Amendment Act, 2019. I want to thank the Minister of Environment and Parks for responding to the needs of ranchers across this province and for taking this positive step forward. Alberta's ranchers and beef producers play an important part in Alberta's economy and environment. Our government wants to ensure that this portion of our cattle industry is set up for continued success. The proposed changes in this bill would create a system that better reflects the current economic reality. It is transparent and fair for ranchers, and it ensures that Albertans get fair market value for the use of the province's land resources.

In addition, modernizing grazing rental rates will be another positive step forward in our commitment to reduce the red tape by

one-third to make life better for Albertans. The goal of red tape reduction is to modernize, update, fix areas that are burdened so that we can create jobs, get Albertans back to work, make it easier for Albertans to access important services they need.

I know that this bill isn't about red tape, but it is great to see that this will reduce red tape for Alberta ranchers. It will simplify and modernize an outdated and complicated system. In fact, it was implemented in 1960. That means Alberta has had the same rates for over 25 years. This change will also provide certainty for our potential and ongoing trade partners like our neighbours to the south, who also happen to be our biggest trading partner. By using market-based rental rates rather than outdated and arbitrary rates, we reduce the risk for trade action. We can't afford to continue to operate this way, so our government is taking action.

The hon. minister of the environment on behalf of our government has worked very closely with industry stakeholders to get their feedback and listen to their concerns. This is important for ranchers in southern Alberta, and they are an important economic driver in my constituency. I've had the opportunity to meet and speak with several ranchers with the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction and the Member for Cardston-Siksika, and it is meaningful legislation for them.

The hon. minister of the environment has ensured this legislative change is balanced, fair, and will transition Alberta's beef industry to a sustainable future, and it is based on sound environmental practices – not an easy job to do. He has confirmed that our government will work closely with farmers and ranchers to develop this new fee structure. It was evident when he spoke to the attendees of a media announcement for this bill that they were excited and optimistic for these changes.

If we can get things right in Alberta for Albertans, we've done what we've intended to do. We were hired by Albertans for Albertans, and by responding to their needs, by reducing this red tape, we can make life better in Alberta. This bill is a good example of a government that listens to its citizens, and I am happy to rise to support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Standing order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody be looking to take that opportunity.

Seeing none, I see the hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock has risen to speak.

Mr. van Dijken: Good. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of Bill 16, the Public Lands Modernization (Grazing Leases and Obsolete Provisions) Amendment Act, 2019, largely dealing with grazing leases throughout the province and dealing with producers, ranchers, farmers that are partnering with our government, with Albertans essentially, to maintain and properly be stewards of the grazing leases, the Crown land that they choose to take care of.

What's so refreshing with regard to Bill 16 is how it's been largely driven by the industry. In our previous term, as the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock in the previous four years, we had meetings with the Western Stock Growers', Alberta Beef Producers, and a number of the organizations that represent the beef producers in Alberta. This was an item that they were advocating for, recognizing the risks that were in place with regard to trade agreements with other countries. They needed to ensure that they were green, essentially green, for trade with other countries and did not want to have a situation where they would be challenged by improper subsidization of their industry. It was very refreshing to

see an industry step forward, recognize a potential threat to their industry, and advocate to government on behalf of their producers to ensure that their industry could stay strong going forward.

3:50

I talk about the farmers and ranchers with regard to being stewards of the land, and one thing that this bill also will help to recognize – and it was identified by the chairman of the Alberta Beef Producers that they were quite pleased to see – is that a portion of the revenue from the grazing rates will be used for environmental stewardship and range improvement, which ensures the land will continue to be healthy and sustainable for future generations. It's an important part of understanding the need to take care of the lands that we are charged with being stewards of. All farmers and ranchers recognize that they are in a position to hand property down the generations in a state that is going to allow it to continue to produce.

One of the things that I did learn also – I don't have beef cattle, livestock at this time – is that the industry came forward with different needs for different regions within the province. There's increased cost to maintaining a grazing lease in the northern part of the province, so they recognized within the group that there were going to be increased costs for those producers, and that had to be recognized in the formulas going forward. They also recognized the need to have rates that would continue to fluctuate going forward based on market conditions, based on the things that are typically out of control of the producer but that they have to live with in a competitive environment with regard to being able to produce a commodity and produce it in a way that would allow them to stay in business. Coming forward with the idea of having those changes in rates based on market conditions was an important part of the consultation also.

I speak in favour of Bill 16, recognizing the good collaboration and the good consultation that has taken place to ensure that we have a bill before us that is acceptable to producers, acceptable to government, who are essentially partnering together to maintain these Crown lands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill, third reading of Bill 16?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to put the question to the House.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 17 Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare's Law) Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, it's been an honour to introduce and speak to Bill 17, Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare's Law) Act, and to see such strong support across the province and from both sides of this House. It's important to ensure that we get this legislation right, which I've mentioned several

times before already, because, ultimately, our goal is to prevent situations from reaching a stage where there is a risk of significant or imminent harm. There are victims and survivors in this province that understand the importance of this legislation as a mechanism to protect Albertans from the risk of domestic violence.

As I mentioned before, domestic violence doesn't discriminate. On that note, I am certain that there are many of you in this House that have friends and acquaintances or know someone that has been impacted by domestic violence. I would like to say that I value the feedback that I've received thus far, and I'm committed to working with my officials and colleagues to address any concerns and answer questions raised during this committee meeting. It will take the collective insight on both sides of this House and the feedback and lived experiences from our stakeholders to inform our next steps. As we are all aware, there are many details to be worked out in the regulations, and through stakeholder engagement and consultation we will ensure the regulations are as robust and as effective as possible.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts and answering your questions today. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 17, Clare's law, and thank you to the minister as well for her brief comments.

I'm so proud of the commitments the NDP government made when it came to the issue of domestic violence and supports for folks, and one example of what I was so proud of as, of course, not a member of the NDP government, but I was so proud to watch MLA Deborah Drever introduce the Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, and that made it possible for victims of domestic violence to end their tenancy agreements without any risk of financial penalty. This was a clear move to stand up for Albertans by making it easier for them to leave an unsafe home and maintain their independence as well. What was so powerful about this was that safety could now be a key consideration instead of any sort of financial and other barriers that folks faced.

It's one example of the many steps that this NDP government took to help break the cycle of domestic violence. I'm also happy to see that this government is continuing that and taking this issue seriously as well. You know, I don't believe it's a partisan issue, and it shows that we can see eye to eye on certain critical topics. Because, as the minister noted, it is clear that domestic violence does not discriminate, and those affected need to have supports in place.

I do think it is important to raise a few questions and ask a few things to clarify. In principle we've been clear that we support this bill, we support its intentions, but one of the main things that we need to get across is that without a commitment to provide the funding and the resources necessary to support victims and the services that they rely on, this bill will unfortunately not be able to be as effective as it could be. It is a positive step, for sure, but a legal tool such as this one will only be successful if it's supported by the well-funded social services and programs to keep people truly safe in our communities.

In my role as critic for status of women I spent the last number of months speaking with many stakeholders who work on the front lines of domestic violence, providing supports for women in particular. One of the things that I heard loudly and clearly through those conversations is that steps like this one, Clare's law, are undoubtedly important, but they need to be supported by funding

and by resources. In fact, one stakeholder, who I respect greatly and has worked in this field for over 30 years, noted that, you know, without resources it actually has a potential to be harmful, and I take her at her word on this.

So I'd ask the government to ensure that with this bill there be clear resources and clear supports in place. It's light on details. As the Minister said, it is enabling legislation. It's quite skeletal at this point, so I'm very hopeful that the government will be quite specific in the support that will be provided. The law needs to be part of a larger suite of measures and supports. For instance, will there be supports in place for the potential victim who discloses? We know this can be a hugely traumatizing experience, so those supports need to be readily available. That victim needs to know where to go, where to turn to.

Another huge piece is looking at next steps. We know that victims often lack proper resources to safely leave dangerous relationships and have to overcome a whole lot of barriers, one of which is housing. There are examples of this being a clear issue in other jurisdictions.

4:00

In Saskatchewan, where Clare's law was implemented earlier this year, some advocates have pointed out that, particularly for folks in rural and remote parts of that province, the law is rendered ineffective because there aren't the resources available for those women needing to access them. One woman is on the record stating that the law is not helpful because, as she pointed out, not only did her husband have no prior criminal record, but she said that resources are what's needed, and they weren't available for her in rural Saskatchewan.

I represent an area where there are severe housing concerns, and nearly daily my staff and I hear from folks in neighbourhoods throughout my riding who are struggling to find safe, affordable housing. I just want to hammer home the point that it is so essential that these supports like housing be in place. I urge this government to lay out in their upcoming budget how they will offer housing supports not only to victims of domestic violence but to all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-West has risen to speak.

Mr. Ellis: Why, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm very proud to stand up here and, of course, support this law as brought forward by the hon. minister. I have listened intently both to my colleagues within the House and on the other side, and I believe that they as well have been supportive of this, so it's great.

You know, as I listened intently to the words of the previous speaker, it kind of made me reflect a little bit about the crisis that we face with the opioids, as an example, in that, yeah, I mean, this is a multilayered, complex problem. I don't believe that this particular piece of legislation is the solution, we'll call it, to all domestic violence or domestic situations; however, I do certainly believe that this is a tool in a tool box that would be able to help people.

Of course, you know, when I look here at the question of domestic violence disclosure legislation, will it protect people at risk of domestic violence? It looks like it allows people in domestic violence to obtain information on intimate partners and previous history of domestic violence and other relevant acts and could save lives.

You know, Mr. Chair, I think, as you're fully aware – and I'm very proud of this fact – that I spent well over a decade, certainly, policing on the streets of Calgary. It's very sad. I notice that there

are some statistics that I've seen specifically where it says that Alberta has the third-highest rate of police-reported intimate partner violence of the Canadian provinces. I think it even had a date here, somewhere around 2008 to '17, which for a bulk of that time, actually, I was on the streets working as a police officer. Sadly, I got to be either a first responder as a constable and even in certain cases as a supervisor in those particular situations. They're very volatile. Really, to understand the complexity of domestics in itself is, again – I mean, there are a multitude of factors. Sometimes it's a financial issue, sometimes it's drugs or alcohol, or sometimes, sadly, in certain cases some people just stop getting along.

However, when I look at this, you know, key piece of legislation, which allows an intimate partner to really learn the history – I was thinking about this and I was reflecting upon this, and again I'm reflecting on my experiences when I was working on the streets. I think it's to really kind of understand the history, we'll say, of domestic offenders, right? I certainly don't want to categorize it as a gender; however, predominantly in my experience most males had tended to be the offenders in these particular situations, at least the ones that I attended.

My experience was that it was gradual, right? We saw this. At least, when I was investigating we'll call it the history of what led up to the moment where the police were ultimately called, you know, what I found that was very consistent, especially in really complex domestic situations, was that the history was, of course, that the people meet, and it's a very positive relationship, and then all of a sudden something happens. Usually the intimate partner is: "Okay. Well, I mean, that's not cool, but – you know what? – I can accept that. I really love that person." Okay. Then it becomes almost like a situation where you keep on moving the goalposts. Sadly, it leads to the point, almost the crisis point, where ultimately the police are called, and sometimes it's violent, and sometimes it's situations where, certainly, there's a lot of verbal abuse that goes on.

But having a piece of legislation like this, which kind of allows the awareness – you've heard me talk before in the House, Mr. Chair, about education, prevention, and intervention, of course. Letting everyone in Alberta know that this sort of tool is available in the tool box for people that may find themselves in these types of domestic situations is actually very vitally important, right? You know, that would give that person the opportunity to find out, maybe, that somebody has a pattern of behaviour, a history, we'll call it.

Many a time, other than when kids are, you know, we'll say, starting off, whenever they're starting to date – and I don't want to use any actual ages because I know that everybody starts dating at various ages. As a police officer, when you're starting to investigate folks in their 20s and 30s or even older, typically the offender may have a pattern of abuse that maybe predates the relationship which they are in. Sometimes they go back even further.

Mr. Chair, there were about two and a half years when I was a judicial interim release hearing officer, and we dealt with a lot of domestics, of course. I was the one that would do the bail hearings on these particular domestics. You've got to forgive me here, but there was a decision that was made – I think it was a Court of Queen's Bench decision – that essentially allowed that when I was giving my presentation, even though this may be an offender that has no previous criminal convictions, as an example, we could bring in the history of allegations because it was well documented in the courts that sometimes in domestic situations these offenders might have a history that, again, predates the relationship which they're in.

As you're aware, when we're going to detain somebody, possibly in custody, we use what are called primary, secondary, and tertiary

grounds. Of course, the secondary grounds would have to do with likelihood of reoffending. When we go back and we look and we see that this guy, again predominantly men but can be a man or a woman, typically has a pattern of behaviour, sometimes where the person isn't even convicted – again, these become, ultimately, public documents, especially in the cases where you have a prosecutor and a defence. Sometimes, I can tell you, the victims in these particular cases are actually quite shocked. They had no idea that the intimate partner with which they had had a relationship for however long had a history of domestic abuse even though they may not have ever been convicted.

Having that tool when the possible victim of domestic violence or abuse suspects that, "Wait a second; I think I might not be the only one here" and then they're able to have this tool to find out that, "Hey, you know what? I was right," maybe – I say maybe, and I say this in a very positive way – that helps them in assisting with their choice not to be with that particular individual. Again, when we talk about saving lives, could that save a life? Yes. I think that you've heard me in this House before. I mean, if we can save even just one life, then it makes that piece of legislation worth it.

4:10

I mean, I think that with these situations, you know, especially when I see, again, some of the statistics that I've seen regarding the amount of domestic violence in Alberta and, sadly, even in Canada – from 2008 to '17 there were 166 deaths in Alberta due to domestic violence – yeah, everybody should be concerned about that.

Again, a tool in the tool box. I think there are a lot more things that can be done to help, certainly, victims in those sorts of domestic situations. Again, this is a multifaceted problem. It is very, very complex. There is no one solution to solving it, but I certainly commend the minister for bringing this forward. I think this is a positive tool in the tool box. I think this is going to be one that, especially with the awareness component, when we talk about just making sure that the people in Alberta are aware – right? – that this tool is available for them, can only have a positive repercussion on this.

I want to thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak on this. I want to thank the minister for bringing it up. You know, I want to thank all the members who are supporting this, and I'll thank the opposition as well. I thank you, and I yield my time.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen to speak.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise today in support of Bill 17, Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare's Law) Act. I'd like to begin as well by thanking the Minister of Community and Social Services for bringing forward this legislation. I apologize if I'm going to say things that perhaps many people have already said. It's just that this is an issue that is quite near and dear to my heart, and I wanted to be on the record to speak to it. I do recognize, of course, that the minister has already outlined, even in her opening comments today in Committee of the Whole, that there are some details that are missing from the legislation. I just wanted to take the opportunity to speak to that a little bit.

As well, I'd also like to begin by saying that I may be frequently referring to women who are survivors or victims of domestic violence. I recognize, of course, that not all victims of domestic violence are women. We know that any individual can be a victim of domestic violence, but we also know that predominantly it is women. I just want to say that while I will be probably speaking

mostly about women, I recognize that men, of course, can also be victims of domestic violence.

As actually already mentioned by the Member for Calgary-West and as well by the minister herself, I do want to highlight that this is a very useful tool, as the Member for Calgary-West said, a tool in a tool box. I don't think it is the role of legislation to always fix all problems completely. We know that that's pretty much impossible in complex situations. I recognize that this is not being put forward as a solution to the issue of domestic violence. Rather, it is a tool in the tool box to address it, and I appreciate that.

I do want to mention that – again, I recognize that this might have been commented on before – while the bill is a good step forward, and I appreciate it is also enabling legislation, there is a lot of information and details that will have to be worked out in the regulations, and it's going to be very important how those things are fleshed out in those regulations.

Some of the things that I know I will be looking for in terms of what will come in those regulations: the bill does refer to, of course, an individual who may make a request but also that there may be other individuals who may make a request on behalf of an applicant. You know, just fleshing out who that could be, we understand that maybe it will be social workers – maybe it will be family doctors, counsellors, police – looking to see sort of who will be able to make those applications and if there will be any kind of requirements as to what needs to be met before an individual other than a person who is potentially directly affected by domestic violence is making that application. If it's a third party, what are the standards or who are the categories of people that will be captured by that? What is their position of trust or relationship with the person upon which they are making that request?

I think that will be very important to know because, of course, the reason that we care about this – we all care about this – is that the information we're talking about, not only is it very sensitive and potentially inflammatory information, but the person upon whom it's being requested for is likely in a very dangerous situation. We just need to be very cautious to know when those applications will be made and which third parties will be able to make it on their behalf. That goes to that question of that right to ask, right? Who does have the right to ask, particularly if it is a third party? I'm looking forward to some clarification. I know that in the Saskatchewan version of this bill they did set out within the act those individuals who may make application, and perhaps that's going to be a guideline for the regulation.

One of the challenges we have with respect to this kind of legislation is that it is relatively new, and there aren't a lot of jurisdictions that have had a great deal of time with its actual implementation. We know that it has been implemented in other countries, the U.K. in particular, but still relatively recently, so we don't have the benefit of a lot of evidence or experience. That certainly should not prevent us from taking those steps forward. It just means that we may need to be a little bit more cautious and thoughtful as to what we're doing because we don't have the benefit of others' experiences.

With respect to decision-making about when a disclosure will be made to an applicant or a third party making an application, you know, I think we have to think about – and I note from the bill that it is a police service that will be making that decision as to disclosing that information. I know that police services across the country, across Alberta have been doing a great deal of work to understand and to train with respect to domestic violence, but of course this is an additional responsibility. I do recognize that police will often make disclosures where it is seen to be important to do so already, but if we are going to be setting up a system or a process by which a police service is managing these applications and is

making a decision about disclosing this information, we want to make sure that those police officers have the appropriate training to exercise that discretion carefully and thoughtfully, which I know they will. But just to make sure those supports are there for the police service to do that.

I think the other issue with respect to making a decision to disclose information to an applicant with respect to domestic violence is the timeliness of the disclosure. I note that there is sort of a wide variety sometimes in timeliness. In the limited experiences that we've seen from the U.K., sometimes a disclosure can be made quite quickly. Sometimes it takes a lot longer. This is critical, of course, in this area because, you know, when a woman is at a point where she might be seeking this information, it may be at a point where she's already considering leaving her partner or leaving that situation, which we also know by the evidence is the most dangerous time for those women. When they're at that point, we know that the numbers, the intensity, the violence associated with those situations increases exponentially when the woman is actually looking to leave the situation. It's a high-risk situation, so timeliness is important. We need to make sure that those requests can be handled in a timely way so that that information can be disclosed quickly.

However, there also needs to be a little bit of caution, and this speaks a little bit to how the decision will be made to disclose. Perhaps there should be input. When a decision is made to disclose, there should be appropriate input from perhaps other people who are in that individual's life. I don't know if it will just be the police service who will be making that decision, but there might be a need to seek a variety of information sources before making that decision to disclose because sometimes the police may not have all the information they need to make that decision. That could, of course, affect timeliness because bringing in other individuals to weigh in on that decision may take more time. It is a very delicate balance between needing to be timely but making sure that the decision is very thoughtful because the disclosure can be quite significant.

I also want to speak to the issue of what is disclosed to an individual, what information, the content of the information that is disclosed to an applicant. I understand that in other jurisdictions sometimes all that's disclosed is that the individual about whom the information is sought, the perpetrator in this case, all that might be disclosed is whether there's a high risk or a low risk of that person being a danger to the applicant. Sometimes, of course, more detailed information is presented, and it might be specifics about actual convictions. Again, those are just questions because I don't know what would go into making those determinations about whether or not somebody is high risk or low risk and how the recipient who's getting that information will interpret that or how they will understand that without more detail.

4:20

But if we do get to more detailed information such as convictions, which I think – I would imagine we can all agree that if there is a prior conviction with respect to domestic violence, that would seem to fit right within the scope of this legislation. My concern, of course, is that we know that domestic violence is tragically underreported. Not only is it underreported, but we know that for domestic violence, sexual violence, it's very challenging for a victim or a survivor to actually get a conviction. The fact is that there are so many instances where it would not be reported, and then even if it is reported, the chances of a conviction are slim as well. That's just supported by the statistics.

Again, if we're limiting the information that an applicant might receive to simply a conviction, I'm worried that it might give a false sense of security in some situations, where, you know, a woman

might say, “Well, there’s no conviction,” but that might not mean that there hasn’t been a complaint made. Certainly, it would be limited to a complaint made to the police versus complaints made to other individuals. Now, I’m not saying – I don’t know how we would possibly capture all those other complaints, and there is an issue of fairness that we have to consider. I worry that if we are limiting the information that is disclosed to simply convictions, we’re actually not capturing a lot of potentially high-risk situations, and it may give a victim or a survivor of violence a false sense of security if they get a report saying that there are no prior convictions.

The other issue I’d like to raise – again, I’m sure that it’s been raised a number of times – is about privacy. On this case what I’m concerned about is: if a woman has received this information, how is that protected? We do not want it to be obviously known to the perpetrator that the woman has now received information about his prior conviction. Again, I realize that I’m using gendered terms here, and I apologize for that. I’m making some generalizations here. That is a concern because again I go back to – the point at which a woman might be making a decision about needing that information about her partner is usually a very volatile and high-risk moment, so if there is a risk that somehow the perpetrator of the violence will be notified or will become aware somehow that she has sought that information, that exponentially increases her risk. With respect to privacy I think that just speaks to the delicacy of the situation, and I’m hoping that, as part of the development of the regulations, conversations are had with, for example, the Privacy Commissioner to see if there is some advice with respect to how to manage that.

I note that Bill 17 does capture what’s known as the right to know, which means that there will be situations where a woman is advised of her partner’s prior convictions without seeking that information herself: she didn’t ask for it, but perhaps the police have become aware of a situation. They know that perhaps a perpetrator or somebody who’s been convicted of this offence is now in an intimate relationship. Perhaps that person is at a high risk, so they disclose it without the applicant asking. Again, I think that probably already happens to some extent with police services, but we want to make sure that there are additional resources because it’s now placing a somewhat proactive obligation on police to disclose. There needs to be the appropriate resources with respect to that.

Again, I want to reiterate that I do support this bill and the intent behind the bill. I think it is very important that we do move forward with this, but I do want to highlight that any time we talk about legislation, we do have to think, of course, about unintended consequences.

I note that there was an article published by the University of Calgary Faculty of Law’s blog. The authors are Jennifer Koshan and Wanda Wieggers. It’s specifically on Bill 17, and the article was published October 18, 2019. I will table this in the House as well if there’s an interest in that. The article is *Clare’s Law: Unintended Consequences for Domestic Violence Victims?* One of the things that the article points out is that a potential unintended consequence of this legislation is that victim blaming could become an issue. Actually, I should say that victim blaming is already an issue when it comes to domestic violence. We know that, you know, we have ideas, and we’ve seen the courts reinforce them although they have been moving forward to take those stereotypes down, but we expect victims of domestic violence to act in a particular way. If they don’t, we sometimes hold them accountable for that. In particular, we certainly tend to hold victims accountable to leave their perpetrators and perhaps situations where it’s not easy to do so. There are complex reasons why many women stay in violent relationships, and we don’t want to be doing anything to encourage that.

I do worry that by creating this one potential unintended consequence that, you know, if a woman either does not make an application for this disclosure or does make an application and it is disclosed to her that her partner has a prior conviction and she does not leave, she will then be blamed for that, for not leaving. It’s not just blamed in the court of public opinion, but what we see is that women can often be held accountable by having their children apprehended.

I’m going to quote now from this article that I referred to. The authors state:

A vast literature shows that women who do not leave abusive partners are at risk of having their children apprehended, because exposure to domestic violence has been legally defined as placing children in need of protection. Rather than providing supports to abused women in these situations so that they can remain in their homes and communities with their children, we often bring the full force of state intervention upon them – and it is well known that Indigenous women are disproportionately susceptible to this risk, explaining in some cases their reluctance to engage with the police.

I just wanted to raise this because we have to ask ourselves the question of whether victims who do obtain this information will be blamed if they don’t leave and they later sustain abuse. Does it put them at higher risk of having their children removed? This is not to say that we want children to remain in situations where there is domestic violence; rather, we want to create a situation where we can get involved and provide supports and resources to assist that family.

I think the question that these authors ask – and again I will quote – is:

How will Clare’s Law play out in cases involving women who have been criminally charged where they were defending themselves or their children from violence, or where they were wrongfully accused of abuse by their partners?

That’s something else I know. In my conversations with some organizations that are heavily involved in working with women who are survivors of violence have raised, they raise that often, you know, a violent partner will accuse the woman of being abusive. It creates a very tangled web, and what it does is that it creates a situation where both the woman who’s the victim of the violence feels both that she is now being blamed and that she might be held accountable. It also breaks the trust with law enforcement.

I raise those issues not to say that this is not a good bill. It is a good bill, but we just need to be conscious that there might be those implications. Those implications are probably higher for women who are indigenous, racialized, or poor. I just wanted to raise those issues for food for thought.

I appreciate that the minister has been very clear that she is going to be engaging in very thoughtful consultation with stakeholders. I know that there are a number of stakeholders that have already been engaged, and I appreciate that very much. I’m hoping that they will continue to be heavily involved in the development of the regulations, organizations like the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters – there are a number of them – but also involving the police because, as we described, the police will now have a very big role with respect to handling these applications and making sure that they are resourced properly. Also, I mentioned the Privacy Commissioner as a potential, who might have some thoughts on how to navigate the privacy issues around this.

Overall, the comment has been echoed, I think, by a number of people here. The law is a really great tool, but resources need to be there. Resources need to be there when a woman gets information about her partner or a third party seeks that information and she’s at a potentially very high-risk, dangerous situation. Are there supports available to ensure that she can leave that situation in a safe way

and in a safe way that protects her family as well? Those resources have to be available province-wide as well and in remote areas and rural areas, and we need to make sure that this isn't a situation where there are already strong institutions – those women might get supports – but we need to ensure that that's available throughout the province.

I do thank the minister again for bringing forward the legislation. I'll throw this out there if there's any appetite for this. I'm sure that members of the opposition are very much in support of this legislation. If we could be involved in any way in supporting the development of the regulations, I know we would be eager to do so.

Thank you again to the minister. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

4:30

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, it is also my honour to rise in the House and support this bill, the Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare's Law) Act. I, too, wanted to take this opportunity to thank the minister for her hard work on this particular piece of legislation and just to talk a little bit about some of my experiences.

First of all, this bill is going to allow people at risk of domestic violence to obtain information on their partner about a potential history of domestic violence or relevant acts. I believe that this has the potential to save lives.

I also think it's refreshing when we encounter a bill and both sides of the House can stand in support of that bill. I think that's a lovely, refreshing experience for us in this House. I thank the members opposite for your continued support and also for some of the things that you've brought forward around ways to even make it better or improve it. I appreciate the thoughtfulness with which you've engaged in this discussion. Thank you to the members opposite for that.

I also want to thank the minister again for her work to ensure that there are funding and resources available for Alberta's most vulnerable, not just with respect to this bill but all of the Albertans that are impacted by her ministry. Thank you to the minister for that and for her diligence in advocating on behalf of Albertans.

I just wanted to give a little bit of background. I believe that it has already been read into this House, but I wanted to stand and rise again for those, you know, many, many Albertans who will be listening to me right now. I really appreciate their attention. I just wanted to say, in all seriousness, that it's very scary to me that half of all young women and girls who are victims of domestic violence homicide in Canada were murdered by someone with a prior conviction. I think that is a staggering statistic, and I actually did not realize that it was that high until this bill became available for us to discuss in this House. This conviction often is sort of relevant but not direct.

I just think that, in my personal experience – I'll step back a little bit. I've been an employer for 26 years, have employed literally thousands of people in the province of Alberta, and have had the unfortunate opportunity – I guess it was fortunate that I could be there for these staff, but it was unfortunate – to be a witness as an employer to some of the people embroiled in domestic violence in their own homes. How to support them as an employer was very, very challenging. You know, you want to be there for these people, but you also don't want to enable them. There's a fine line there.

I think legislation like this would have been very helpful for some of those staff to have some perspective. I think that sometimes when

you're in these situations, perspective gets skewed, and you're in it for so long that what would have been unacceptable at the start of your relationship with your intimate partner – your defences get worn down, and you start to accept behaviour that would not have been acceptable at the start of your relationship. I think it just escalates, and it's a very slow and subtle escalation, but I also believe that what ultimately happens is that these victims of domestic violence don't have perspective anymore. To have access to third-party information, I think, would have been very empowering for some of the people, some of the women, in this case, that I supported through those challenges.

Unfortunately, the statistics are also that most of the people in these situations tend to go back again and again. I think, as the members opposite pointed out, there can be a stigma around that sometimes. We who haven't walked that road can judge how that happens or why somebody would go back, but I also know that, as many members in this House have risen to speak on this issue, it's very complicated and interconnected. Sometimes there are children involved or extended family. Sometimes the employment is impacted. Often there are cases where these people don't feel like they have another alternative but to go back. You know, my grandpa used to always say that love is blind, and I think that sometimes that's really the case: we love the person, but we don't know how to separate those feelings from the facts of what we're encountering in our relationship.

I'm very happy to rise in support of this bill today. I do believe that it will help prevent domestic violence, and I do believe that it will empower, hopefully, these victims. Again, as has been said in this House, if it saves even one life, it certainly was worth the time and the effort to stand and debate it.

It's also shocking to me that our domestic violence rate here in Alberta is the third highest in Canada. It's really sad to me, and I think that we have a responsibility to improve these statistics and also to educate the public on what this looks like and what this means for people.

I wanted to talk a little bit about the idea behind FOIP and the freedom of information and how this act will be sort of impacted in that way. I don't believe that the intention is to allow anyone to weaponize the act. That's certainly something that we were briefed on with the minister as well, that we have to balance the opportunity to empower these people who are in this situation and give them the knowledge that they need to make a more informed decision and a more unbiased decision in their relationships, but I also believe that we have to balance that with people's right to privacy. Certainly, the legislation: my understanding is that it is being developed with consideration for privacy and for the FOIP Act.

I believe that, you know, we're going to have a lot of work to do in the event that this passes or when this passes the House with respect to the regulations, that we do work to get it right. I'm grateful that we have a model from the U.K., Clare's law, to look to to see how it's been enacted there and what has worked well there. I also know that other jurisdictions in Canada are working right now, and I hope that we can work collaboratively to do the very best on behalf of Albertans and particularly these most vulnerable that are impacted currently.

I also wanted to say that there's been a lot of meaningful engagement – I can see that from the briefings and from the discussions in this House – with the stakeholders involved, and I appreciate that work that's been done already in advance, certainly around things like wraparound supports. Those have been anticipated. There will be needs for that.

You know, one of the things that happens – and I can certainly say again, as an employer who supported, unfortunately, multiple people in this situation over my 26 years in my work life, that each

situation is unique, so we don't have a one-size-fits-all response or support that would work. In some cases it was just the emotional support required. In other cases there was financial support required. In other cases there were multiple supports required.

I find that without understanding, it's very challenging to step in in a meaningful and in a helpful way, so I appreciate the depth of stakeholder engagement that's been undertaken to draft this and to address each individual circumstance, hopefully. I know that we can't anticipate every single circumstance that could possibly occur, but I certainly think there have been serious efforts undertaken to look at the most common ones, anyway, services potentially for justice, sexual assault, housing, and homelessness.

You know, one of the stories I can hearken back to: I was a 22-year-old owner of a business, which is kind of amazing when I think about that now, and this young woman worked for us on the night shift. For her privacy I won't disclose her name. But she would come to work late or with sort of odd behaviour. She wouldn't meet our gaze. She was very shy, and it took us months and months of working side by side to realize that she was in a very, very damaging relationship. Unfortunately, in that case there were two very small children involved, so it's not as simple as saying: hey, we'll help you leave. There were two little babies at home, so the supports that she needed were extensive, and in her case in particular, homelessness would have been a very significant reality had she just walked out the door. It wouldn't have worked. That was a very challenging experience for a young entrepreneur, 22 years old, to try and figure out: how do I best help this woman?

Further to that, you know, mental health is just absolutely huge with respect to this. I think that when you've been in a relationship long enough – and I walked this road with, as I said, a number of people over the years in my business life and also in my personal life. To see the deterioration in mental health and the increase in the capacity to question oneself is really interesting to me, too. It's very, very sad to see women who are strong and, often, educated – not that it's just women; it could be anyone, but in my case it was women that I supported, these women who would be viewed in society as strong and independent, and no one would ever suspect that they were walking in a situation of domestic violence – and to see them not be able to discern what was appropriate behaviour anymore in their intimate partner relationship and also to see them struggle with perspective with respect to encounters with their intimate partner.

4:40

One house in particular I'm thinking of. I would go over to visit for coffee, and the spouse would come home. I would be shocked at the tone and the behaviour in the home and would ask, like: what's going on here? She would say: well, you know, that was fine. Again – I think I've said this already – what wouldn't have been fine at the beginning of the relationship had become fine over the time that they'd been together. Without the capacity to remove oneself from the situation, I think it really does take a toll on the mental health, and I think it becomes more and more challenging for these individuals to see the behaviour for what it is. To access information that would help these people, women and men, who are struggling with this, to see what's really happening and to see a history: I hope it would be sobering enough information for many of them to choose differently.

I also hope that these people wouldn't end up in the situation to begin with because they would have enough of a red flag to go, "Maybe I need to get more information," particularly now in our society. I'm talking 26 years ago. Now it's much more common to meet people online. People may not be from your town or even from your country, so to be able to investigate and find out, you know, what their background is and to do a more thorough search and find

that out before you engage in something that you may not be able to get yourself out of afterwards: certainly, we would want to do everything we could to protect our society and protect people that are entering into these intimate relationships.

Another thing my grandpa used to say is that the person you marry is the making or the breaking of you. I think that quite often what happens is that people enter in with the best of intentions. It can make your life so wonderful, and it can make your life so devastating. In Clare Wood's case it cost her her life, so certainly there are high stakes here.

I also just wanted to touch briefly on indigenous and cultural communities. I've been proud to stand in this House many times with many of the ministers – I'm thinking of the minister of indigenous affairs – and support indigenous issues and support indigenous peoples' rights. I just think it's really great that this is another opportunity. I know it's not directly connected to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, but I also believe that had this law been here, it certainly may have assisted and stemmed some of that tragedy.

I don't have much more to add. I just, really, again wanted to thank the members opposite for their support, thank this House for discussing this, and thank the minister for bringing it forward.

With that, I will thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see that the hon. Minister of Community and Social Services has risen to speak.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just thought I'd take a couple of moments to reflect and talk about some of the feedback that I've heard today. Certainly, I'm very grateful. It's been valuable. It's been very insightful. Maybe I'll just start with the comments that were made by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. It is critical that we do have wraparound supports available. Certainly, during our stakeholder engagement, which was quite extensive – we had two sessions that included a number of participants from multidisciplinary backgrounds – there was near unanimous consensus that we needed to make sure that we had robust wraparound supports available. That's something that I as the minister, obviously, take very seriously. Some of those supports could include obvious things like crisis or medical support, perpetrator intervention and programs, which is not quite as obvious, cultural support services, children's services, and community outreach wraparound supports.

There was also a comment made around housing supports. I think that that's a very relevant comment as well because I did hear that as well during our stakeholder engagement. I think this really does provide a good opportunity for some crossministerial engagement as well with Seniors and Housing and Children's Services. That is something that is also going to be investigated further as we work towards defining the regulations.

In regard to the comments made by the Member for Calgary-West, absolutely, this is another tool in the tool box that we can use in a preventative fashion to make sure that potential victims of domestic violence have something that they could use to be more informed about potentially entering a harmful relationship. One of the things that we want to operationalize in the regulations is robust risk assessment. That will incorporate qualitative and quantitative data that will help inform the decision as to whether to disclose information or not. That was a very important comment, and I think there is consensus in this House that this is a tool. It's not the solution, it's not the answer, but it is something that, in my hope, will definitely bring down the rates of domestic violence in this province.

I was listening very carefully to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud because she brought up a number of questions, actually, around this legislation and how those questions will potentially be answered in the regulations. In regard to applicant eligibility, I know that in the Saskatchewan act third parties are named, but the actual eligibility hasn't been defined in that act as well. We're following Saskatchewan's example very closely, but as we make that decision to define eligibility, obviously it has to be informed by stakeholders. We want to make sure that we incorporate folks who have lived experience, who have gone through this terrible journey, to give us their feedback, to tell us what makes sense as we define eligibility for applicants in the regulations.

In terms of the decision to disclose, it's not necessarily the case that police services are going to make that decision. We are, again, obviously, engaging with stakeholders to determine who will be the best body to actually make that decision to disclose. It could potentially be a multidisciplinary panel that incorporates different areas of expertise that will come together and incorporate the risk assessment as well to ultimately make that decision to disclose. The actual disclosure most likely will be undertaken by police services.

There were a number of comments made about privacy, and I can't emphasize enough that we're very, very sensitive to privacy considerations. We're working very closely with the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to make sure that we can anticipate what potential pitfalls might be and also to ensure that we have mitigating responses put in place that will address privacy considerations.

The one thing that really caught my attention was the comment on unintended consequences, because this is something that I take very seriously, and we've talked about it at length both in the ministry and the department, that with everything we do, with every initiative that we put forward, we have to be extremely mindful of the unintended consequences. The article that was addressed by the member opposite: I'll read that; I'll take a look at it. Certainly, we also have to be very cognizant that we are taking into consideration all cultural sensitivities, particularly as they relate to indigenous women and indigenous communities. That came through loud and clear through our stakeholder engagement.

The Member for Grande Prairie brought up a number of issues as well, and I've already spoken about privacy and how mindful we are to ensure that privacy considerations are taken extremely seriously.

The reasons as to why women or men, any victim of domestic violence, stays in these relationships: I mean, the reasons are so complex and nuanced and sensitive and multifaceted. It's really hard to say or to speak to why these situations perpetuate, but I think it's also important to say that we should never judge. We never know what's happening in a person's life or what their individual circumstances are, what their family circumstances are, whether they've experienced intergenerational trauma. There are so many reasons as to why people stay in relationships. But, again, I'm so confident and hopeful in all of the above that this particular legislation will be preventative in nature and will give people options to stay away from potentially harmful relationships.

4:50

The statistic of Alberta having the third-highest rate of domestic violence in Canada: I mean, it's not just sad; it's devastating. How is it even possible in this province that we have such a terrible statistic? I go back to what I said earlier, when I did my second reading, that this stat is understated, because there are so many cases of violence where people just don't report, again for a variety of different reasons.

I know that there are more concerns yet to be articulated, and I'm very open to feedback and insight, lived experience, anything else

that anybody might be able to offer as we go forward to define these regulations.

Thank you, everyone, once again for your support.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen to speak.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to stand up and speak to this a second time, to speak to Bill 17. I certainly appreciated all of the comments here today. I focused, the first time that I spoke to this piece of legislation, on the importance of wraparound supports. I understand that this legislation is what the government is calling enabling legislation in that most of the details will be determined at a future date. Most of the details will be in the regulations. Again, I just wanted to urge the government, as my colleague suggested, that I know that there are people on this side that would be more than happy to participate in that phase to help out wherever we can.

I did want to focus on the importance of wraparound supports but also on the importance of prevention. It is one thing to give, to provide another tool or to put another tool in the so-called tool box. The rates of violence and abuse in Alberta and Canada are far too high, and anything that we can do to address that or to bring that down is absolutely important. I think what we really need to talk about is: it is one thing to put in a document that, you know, we'll also have wraparound supports, but it's quite another to spend time and energy and invest resources in those supports. So I am going to focus my comments there.

A number of the members have talked about some of the people that are at risk, and some of the personal stories or examples they've shared have really highlighted that. But I wanted to go a little bit further to describing the populations that are at risk and then sort of linking it to supports, wraparound supports or preventative supports, and why those are so important and why it's such an important investment.

One of the groups that maybe we haven't spent a whole lot of time talking about are new Canadians. I know that in the community that I represent, St. Albert, there isn't a huge population of newer Canadians. However, there are a number of families that have recently moved to St. Albert and have been supported. We got to meet them a little bit, and we have heard stories, maybe not necessarily from those families but from other families, talking about sort of the pressures of moving to a new place, the isolation, the lack of relationships, whether it's family or friends, that leaves certain people particularly vulnerable. In those particular instances it was even more difficult for people to leave abusive relationships.

I imagine – I don't know this for sure – that the background information would not be accessible, whether it was to law enforcement or whoever, because there isn't a long history there. These are folks that are new to this community, let alone new to this country, yet maybe they have come with some issues that are problematic or with some violence and with a history of violence. I imagine being in a new community, with a new job or unemployed, with new stresses with the language, new schools: all of those things can continue to add to the stress.

This is a group, actually, that relies quite heavily on community service providers in the community. These are the kinds of wraparound supports that we need to continuously invest in, whether that is a subsidy for affordable housing, whether that's assistance with transportation or assistance learning how to drive. Sometimes it's even the food bank. These are the kinds of supports that we need to invest in.

There is another group that is particularly reliant on community service providers or wraparound supports, as this document talks

about, and that is people with disabilities. I know I mentioned this the first time I spoke to this. I imagine it's true with men also, but I'm going to focus on women with disabilities. We do know that women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable, sometimes twice as vulnerable as women without disabilities, in terms of being victims of violence, whether it's domestic violence, familial violence of some kind. These are the kinds of women and men, I suppose, that are reliant on services in the community.

The reason I'm sort of harping on the need to invest in these services is that these community services rely very heavily on support from government. In some of the cases of the services that I'm describing, they rely heavily on FCSS funding. I mentioned that earlier. FCSS funding is dollars that the province gives to municipalities. The municipalities are also investing. I think it's about an 80-20 split. I know that when we were in government, we invested I think about \$25 million each and every year because this is a growing need. It is one thing to say that we're adding a tool in the tool box to keep people safe and, you know, that we'll also look at wraparound supports, but it is quite another to actually make that investment, to make that financial commitment to continue supporting these programs.

You know, it's sort of a timely discussion. There are so many risk factors, I suppose, that lead people to the place where this becomes a reality and this legislation could potentially touch their lives, but there is so much that we can do to prevent it. I want to tie this back to a motion that came up yesterday. It was the motion about looking at: what are the barriers to reproductive health care for women in rural and remote Alberta in particular? The reason that I'm bringing this up – and I know that those opposite sort of thought that this issue was being brought up to weaponize some kind of issue. Actually, it was being brought up because there was a lack of support, a lack of access to these services in certain communities. Very often for women, in particular, that are isolated or that are in communities that are far away from services, it is more difficult for them to leave situations if they are unable to make the decisions that they need to make about their lives, their bodies, and their futures. I'm not saying that the lack of ability to access these services causes domestic violence. I'm just saying that it's one more risk factor. So this is one more thing that we can actually do to prevent, because I think prevention is the key.

I'm going to talk about, specifically, my community, the community that I represent, St. Albert. There are two services or two organizations that are doing some really amazing work around prevention and support, and that's where I think a big investment needs to be. While I do support this legislation and I trust that the details will be worked out in regulation, I trust that the government will do their due diligence to address all of the concerns that we brought up all through this debate and that we will also focus on prevention and support, the wraparound support. In my community we have two that I want to talk about. One is the Jessica Martel Memorial Foundation. I'm sure that people have heard about this organization. They're actually set to open emergency, first-stage housing in I think 2020. I think they're probably at around 60 per cent of their fundraising goal. They are set to serve the Sturgeon region, Morinville, and St. Albert.

5:00

For those of you who haven't heard about Jessica Martel, sadly, a bill or a piece of legislation that we're talking about here today could easily be named after her. This was a woman who was in a relationship with a man who was clearly violent, with two young children. Obviously, all of the red flags along the way. She actually had family close by, but she died. She was murdered. Her family and community rallied around, got together and decided that this

was something that they wanted to do because she was murdered at the time that they were looking at creating a plan and bringing in the community supports and family supports to allow her to move. Would this piece of legislation have helped? I'm not sure. I hope so. Maybe it would have. It would have given her additional information that she didn't have.

The point of me bringing up Jessica Martel and the work that's been done around creating this housing is that this is a group that had to begin on their own. They had to do fundraising. They had to meet as volunteers, do all of the fundraising activities that so many groups have to do in order to create emergency shelter spaces in St. Albert, Morinville, Sturgeon county, because there's nothing. There really is nothing. We've been told that, you know, women wanting to leave will need to actually go to Edmonton, and that's not always possible. Although Morinville and Edmonton aren't that far apart, it can be very long. It can be, like, an insurmountable distance when you're in a situation like this. This is the kind of program or this is the kind of housing investment that we need to make. If we say that more than anything we want to prevent this and we want to support people after the disclosure, these are the kinds of programs that we need to support.

Also, one of the most effective ways of preventing this is investing in organizations like SAIF society in St. Albert. Again, they rely heavily – heavily – on FCSS, and of course we're nervous. We're bracing for a budget where we don't know where the investment level will be, and any kind of reductions there will directly impact their ability to prevent this kind of tragedy and this kind of violence. I don't know if people know about this: one of the programs that they invest in is called Cut it Out. Probably people have heard of that, and it's actually education with people that are involved in – I'll probably get the sector wrong. They work in salons. These are hairstylists, things like that, because very often there is that point of contact with women that are in violent relationships or are looking for assistance. That can be maybe the one place where they're not being supervised or there isn't somebody watching. It's about educating people that work in that sector to know what to identify – maybe there are patches of hair missing – and how to provide support and how to provide ideas to make a plan to get out.

That's just one of the types of programs that the SAIF society in St. Albert supports. Obviously, they do quite a bit of education in elementary schools, junior high level, and high schools. That's where it needs to happen, whether it's, you know, opening the door for a possible disclosure there or just teaching kids how to identify it themselves, how to identify that this is a problem. Very often, sadly, for kids that grow up in families like that, that's all they know, and unless they've been taught sort of what to recognize and how to report and to know that it's a problem, they don't know.

Again, you know, I don't mean to beat a dead horse here, but it is one thing to have legislation that empowers people with information, and it's quite another not to back it up with investment in prevention and wraparound supports. I just want to encourage everyone – I certainly appreciate any time any work is done around prevention, but I just want to point out that without these other investments, this will not impact the number of people that we need to impact.

I've heard members, again, say over and over again that the level of violence, the number of people that are forced to deal with this kind of violence in our province, is unacceptable. We need to do this. We need to pass legislation like this. We need to get the regulations right, but we need to invest in prevention and wraparound supports – and my colleagues touch on that – which are affordable housing and assistance finding work and getting work that people can support their families with. It's about affordable child care. It's

about accessible child care. It's about outreach and wraparound supports to communities that are particularly vulnerable: people with disabilities, people in our indigenous communities, new Canadians.

There are so many groups that rely so heavily on community service providers that we can't let them down. If we are making a commitment to do everything that we can to keep people safe, then we need to do this piece, Bill 17, but we need to do more than that.

With that, I will end. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 17. I would like to thank the minister for bringing forward the bill, and of course I'm rising to speak in favour of it. I will take a few moments just to talk about my own background because I think it's important to what it is I'm going to say to the bill. Of course, as many of the members of this side of the House have done, there are some cautions, but we would not want those cautions to stop us from moving forward in the steps that we can take at this particular time.

Many of you may know that prior to being elected, I had a 33-year career as a social worker, with a specialization in the area of family violence. I had the great pleasure to work with many, many families struggling through this area. I say "pleasure" not because of what brought them to me but because I really, truly learned to value the truth that families brought to their experience and the incredible work that they do to resolve complex, traumatic situations in their lives in order to create a better world for themselves and their children.

I had an opportunity to work in this area initially as a child welfare worker for the Alberta government for a number of years, and subsequently I was in private practice for about a dozen years, working in the area of child sexual abuse. The last 11 years, of course, I was teaching in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary, where I taught a number of courses specifically on or related to family violence. At the same time I was doing some consultation work with some agencies, including, for example, the Association of Communities Against Abuse, which is a family violence organization in Stettler, Alberta. I had an opportunity to drive down there and, of course, provided consultation at that time to many northern communities, including many First Nations communities. I began to see these situations from a variety of perspectives, from both rural and urban perspectives. I had a sense of some of the patterns that develop in these situations but also of some of the ways in which the system – both myself as a child welfare worker and subsequently as a therapist and subsequently as a consultant – had a differential approach to a variety of situations, depending on characteristics of the moment.

I wish I could say that I did the right thing at all times, but, you know, none of us realistically can say that. I certainly always enter in my work with the best of intentions, but I'm quite aware that there are a variety of systemic pulls that make us move in a direction that sometimes we're unaware of for a while, and even once we've become aware of them, sometimes they're very difficult to get beyond. So even though you have the best of intentions, you can sometimes have some negative consequences to your behaviours. We talk about that in the House all the time. Well, it's true in the human services field as much as it is in legislation in the House or as it is in any other field that we work in.

5:10

The concern that I have in this particular case is the nature of defining a list that somehow begins to suggest that there is some power in that list to differentiate people who are offenders from people who are not offenders, and if it does, I accept that then there's some value. If it does help, you know, as we often say, even one person to avoid a situation where they potentially might become a victim, then I think there's some value in it.

The thing that concerns me as a former therapist, though, is that when we have a situation like that – and I know because I worked with people who were often in these kinds of situations – they begin to rely on that list as somehow an external indicator or marker of the veracity of what they're being told by the perpetrator. So if you have someone who is not on the list, then it becomes very easy for them to say: well, if I had done something wrong, then of course I'd be on the list; I'm not on the list; therefore, I'm safe. Now, some of us wouldn't buy that kind of an argument, but of course you have to understand that in a situation of violence and oppression there is a very systemic grooming behaviour that goes on that seeks to violate the self-awareness of the victim and undermine the victim's ability to respond appropriately to a situation. What happens is that they come to a place where they can't trust their own judgment. They begin to seek the list as an external measure of what is right and what is wrong and whether or not somebody is safe or is not.

That has two issues that I think we need to talk about. One of them is that it's very dangerous somehow to say that we have this list and that therefore people on the list are bad folks and then imply that if they're not on the list, they're not bad folks. That gives a very dangerous message. I just want to be very cautious about how this is presented into the community, that we don't start to identify this as the list that will help to separate out those who are dangerous from those who are not, because I think that puts vulnerable people who are seeking external guidance, given the dynamic of their relationships, into a place where they trust information that isn't trustworthy, because we cannot guarantee that the list in any way reflects systematically people who are dangerous versus people who are not.

We ran into that kind of situation often when we were looking at treatment as well. People would come to us and say: has this person gone through treatment? And we'd have to say yes or no. Yes, they've gone to that treatment. But that didn't necessarily indicate whether or not they were safe now that they had gone through treatment.

We found that in some research, particularly done in the jail system in Manitoba, women were looking at the jails to see whether or not the person that they were involved with had gone through the offender treatment in the jail setting as a determination as to whether or not they would get back together again with them. The research indicated in the end that having gone through the treatment didn't necessarily make you any safer. It was a big disappointment to therapists, people like me who said: well, that's pretty rotten; we were hoping that we'd be able to demonstrate that our work is effective. But in this particular case it wasn't. However, the list of who had gone through that treatment was being used by women to identify their own safety in terms of whether or not they should get back together again with somebody that actually left the judicial system. So I just worry about the power of the list in terms of identifying safety or nonsafety.

The other part that I think is of concern is who gets onto the list. Now, again, back to my comment that our best of intentions is that we put people on the list because they deserve to be on that list, but we know systemically that that isn't actually what happens. There are a variety of reasons why people get put on the list and a variety

of reasons why people don't get put on the list that have nothing to do with their safety or not. Now, you may say: well, hold it; in this case we have the subjective measure that they've been charged with something and that that's what puts them on the list. But we know in the research about who gets charged that there's a differential rate of charging of people, depending on which ethnic community and which socioeconomic community they come from.

The research across North America would indicate that if you are a rich, white man, someone like me, the chances of me getting charged for this kind of misbehaviour in society is significantly less than people who do not come from that category that I have the privilege of accidentally falling into. What we have is a situation where, I know from speaking to the members of the indigenous community, very often their charges are quick to occur in situations where officers arrive and the apparent culprit is someone who is of the indigenous community, much quicker than it would be if they arrived in a situation where they were not part of the indigenous community.

The research also tends to indicate that this is generally true with regard to socioeconomic status as well, that if you arrive at a household that is a million-dollar house and has two cars in the garage, you tend to be a little bit more cautious, perhaps judicious in your decision to move forward and to impose charges. As a result, people in that category don't tend to get on the list as often.

I think, then, we have to be very cautious about how much power we give to a list when we know that getting on the list or not on the list is not a wholly appropriate mechanism, but there are structural reasons why some groups are overrepresented over other groups that are not specifically related to the actual issue of whether or not they are in danger of committing violence.

In my work with some of the indigenous communities in my life as a social worker, people would often tell me that vast numbers of members of the community were on the lists, whatever those lists were in those situations, of people who were dangerous, that that was really a reflection of white societal attitudes towards indigenous peoples rather than what actually happened in families, and that families saw the intrusion by the white justice system as problematic. Then it led to a situation of women needing to sort of move into this cognitive place where they say, "Well, if a guy is on the list, then it really is a reflection of racial intolerance rather than his dangerousness," therefore moving into a place of denial of the danger that was inherent.

We have a real problem if that begins to occur, if we start to have people say, "The list itself is problematic, and therefore I need to ignore the list." Why it becomes problematic is because there's a second part to this, that women then find themselves being asked, "Why would you get back together with this guy when you were told that he was on the list?" Now, the answer is: "Because I came to believe that the list was prejudicially constructed." But in the courts it may be viewed rather as a problem of: "You actually had some information that you should have used to protect your children, and because you didn't use that information, then we deem you to be less competent in terms of the protection of your own child and therefore more susceptible to having your children removed."

So you can see the double bind that a woman that is the victim of violence would be in. On the one hand, if she believes the list, then she is contributing to racial intolerance against her own people. If, on the other hand, she does not believe in the list, she is threatening her own ability to provide continuing care for her own children because she's being told by others that she's an inadequate parent.

5:20

It's just those kinds of double binds that are problematic. Double binds exist in many places in society, and we can't avoid them all,

but we can do a number of things to ensure that these problems are resolved. I think that the Member for St. Albert spoke very well about the fact that just simply putting out a list could be dangerous if you don't also wrap that list with a variety of services and techniques of ensuring that the use of that list, both by professionals and nonprofessionals, is guided by the wisdom that we have gleaned over the years about the nature of violence in families.

That would mean putting this bill, Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare's Law) Act, out there into the world without also ensuring adequate training for professionals so that they don't make statements like, "Well, did you check the list?" or "Why didn't you respond when you saw his name on the list?" — that would be revictimizing the person who was initially victimized — and also without significant support and training for women to understand how the list may be helpful but also may be limited in terms of their decision-making, both when somebody is on the list and when somebody is off the list.

If we had some commitment by the government to ensure that the wraparound services and the appropriate training of professionals were all in place and that this wasn't simply a tool that's thrown into the air hoping that people will catch it properly and use it properly, then I'd feel a bit more secure here. You know, I have said from the beginning that I'm going to support this legislation, but what I will do is that I will follow that up in our budget discussions, starting on Thursday of this week and next week, by saying: "Thank you. You've said that you want this act in the House. I agree with this act in the House. I want to now ask you what you have done to ensure that this act is not going to become a danger in the community. What have you done in terms of your budget?"

It isn't good enough to make a small move without understanding that that move is part of a larger, more complex need in the community and that only doing part of something can sometimes be more detrimental than doing nothing at all. Hopefully, that's not true. I'm giving you my faith that it's not true, but I certainly would like to see and have some assurance from the government, starting on Thursday and throughout next week, that they are going to do the right kinds of things, that they're going to actually take what we have learned in terms of the nature of family violence and act on that in order to ensure people's safety.

It isn't good enough just to say, "I'm against family violence" if your behaviours and your money don't follow that up. I think that's very important. I think that that's going to be a universal caution for the government side of the House, that it's not good enough that you say that you support some particular thing, but then you actually have to do something about it. I'll say the same thing when it comes to saying that they care about child poverty. I say: "So what are you doing about it? Are you providing services for children? Are you providing daycare spaces? Are you providing school lunch programs? Are you doing all those things that we did in our time and were able to reduce child poverty by 50 per cent?"

Those are the kinds of things that I will expect to happen. It isn't just a matter of declaring your moral stance on something. It's about taking brave and courageous behaviour to ensure that the outcome is the outcome that you desire and is satisfactory and not simply something to show good intent without actually trying to achieve the ultimate reward that one would hope to achieve from these kinds of bills.

I put my cautions out there. I appreciate the chance to speak to the minister and to the House on this issue. I would suggest that I'm even happy to have further conversations outside of the House if that's at all helpful at any time. I bring a certain expertise to these kinds of discussions.

But, most importantly, I guess I want to caution and cajole the government into making sure that they don't do the least possible

to resolve violence but that they do the most possible to resolve violence. That includes putting the act out there and then ensuring that the implementation of the act is robust and focused on the ultimate outcome and the demonstration of achievement of success.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Do I see any other members wishing to speak to this bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 17, Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare's Law) Act?

[The clauses of Bill 17 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Chair, I move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 17.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, say no. So ordered.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 18

Electricity Statutes (Capacity Market Termination) Amendment Act, 2019

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to move second reading of Bill 18, the Electricity Statutes (Capacity Market Termination) Amendment Act, 2019.

Although the previous government's planned capacity market is not yet operating, the current legislation and regulations direct that Alberta's electricity agencies are to continue implementing the capacity system until it is fully operational in 2021. This proposed bill will stop all that work associated with implementing a capacity market for electricity.

This, Mr. Speaker, will help restore investor certainty in Alberta's electricity system by returning the province to an energy-only market. This is a market system that has been operating in Alberta for more than 20 years. This is a market system that investors know and trust and want to work with. We know this because investors told us so.

Mr. Speaker, I met with stakeholders over the summer seeking their feedback on which market system can best power Alberta's

future. Stakeholders, industry, and consumer groups were almost unanimous in their support for an energy-only market. So we asked ourselves: why do we even have legislation to implement a capacity market, that Alberta's electricity stakeholders and consumers didn't want? The sector didn't ask for it. They weren't even consulted until it was time to develop the legislation for it. Well, it was because the previous government policy at the time imposed the change.

Mr. Speaker, a number of economic and policy changes have occurred since that happened in 2016, when the capacity market was first announced. For example, government policy at the time supported a rapid growth in renewable generation, and while our government supports renewable generation, we will not subsidize it. We welcome market-driven renewables that compete with other forms of power production.

5:30

Our decision to retain an energy-only market for electricity was a deliberate part of our market-driven approach to renewables, and this decision is already paying off. In just the last two months four companies have invested more than \$2.3 billion in electricity projects. These projects include Suncor's cogeneration unit at its oil sands base plant facility, Perimeter Solar and TC Energy's new solar power purchase agreement just south of Calgary – that's a \$200 million project – Greengate Power's solar project in Vulcan, and BHE Canada Rattlesnake's wind project in southeastern Alberta, which has the potential to be the largest wind power project in Canada. These projects would not be happening without the investor certainty that returning to the energy-only marketplace provides.

Mr. Speaker, at the time the capacity market was announced, it was also assumed that Alberta would experience a coal cliff caused by retiring coal-fuelled electricity generation and no coal-to-gas conversions. Well, federal regulations now allow coal-to-gas conversions. It was also assumed, back in 2016, that Alberta would see a prolonged period of low wholesale electricity prices, but electricity spot prices have recovered.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's energy-only market works. It has provided reliable and affordable electricity to Albertans and has attracted investment for more than 20 years. I know that the opposition wants Albertans to think otherwise, with their fearmongering about blackouts and price spikes, but the truth is that Alberta's energy-only market has successfully delivered favourable outcomes for Albertans.

Currently our electricity grid has a reserve margin of over 25 per cent. That's 10 percentage points higher than the target reserve margin recommended by the North American Electric Reliability Corporation. While it is true that price spikes are associated with an energy-only market, they are a necessary and desirable feature as they aid in generator cost recovery and they actually incent new investment, helping to ensure long-term adequacy of supply. Additionally, the energy-only market encourages investment decisions, where investors, not consumers, not taxpayers, bear the risk.

When I spoke to stakeholders and specifically asked them what market system they wanted to invest in, they couldn't have been more clear. They stated loudly and clearly that they want the certainty of an energy-only market. They don't want to gamble with an experiment, an untested capacity market system, that would take a long period of time to get right. Investors understand Alberta's well-established market, which offers them greater certainty regarding its future performance. It offers structural and administrative simplicity and regulatory clarity.

Mr. Speaker, as I previously mentioned, Bill 18 would halt the creation of the capacity market. The proposed act enables

amendments to three different pieces of legislation that govern the electricity system in Alberta: the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, the Electric Utilities Act, and the Hydro and Electric Energy Act. The majority of the proposed changes in Bill 18 are repeals. They're housekeeping matters that remove all references to the capacity market. All capacity-market-specific policy objectives are being removed, and authorities enabling the electricity agencies to establish and operate a capacity market are being reversed.

Legislative and regulatory amendments that were enacted in 2018 to enable the creation of a capacity market included a few modernizations that were not directly related to the capacity market. The majority of those relate to how the AESO consults on and makes its rules. These provisions are being retained in the proposed bill. These changes better align Alberta's rule-making processes with best practices in other jurisdictions.

Additionally, there's some cleanup that has been done in other acts. Some of the terminology has been streamlined, and provisions that are no longer relevant have been repealed. Complementary changes will also be made to electricity regulations.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans and investors need certainty in their electricity market, not an experiment. If passed, Bill 18 will end the creation of the capacity market for electricity and return Alberta to the well-established, tried-and-true energy-only market, a market system that will continue to provide a reliable supply of electricity at affordable prices, a market system that investors understand and one in which they have confidence and want to invest and one that provides them with policy certainty. This proposed legislation will restore investor confidence in Alberta's electricity system and, when combined with other recent government initiatives such as reducing red tape and reducing Alberta's corporate tax rate, will ensure that Alberta investors know that Alberta is open for business.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has the call.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 18, Electricity Statutes (Capacity Market Termination) Amendment Act, 2019. Let me begin by saying that this is just more of the same: a big \$4.5 billion giveaway to big corporations while Albertans pay the price. This move will cost Albertans. This move will cost consumers more on electricity bills and will take us back to rolling blackouts and price spikes. Certainly, this bill will impact many Albertans across this province, in my riding as well, and more concern.

I mentioned my riding because my riding has lower income than most of Calgary; for instance, in the Taradale neighbourhood. The Calgary average individual income is \$43,000, and in Taradale the average income is \$28,000. A huge difference there. Similarly, in Saddle Ridge the average median income for an individual is \$30,000 as compared to Calgary's average of \$43,000. In Martindale it's \$29,000. In all these neighbourhoods almost 30 per cent of the people spend more than 30 per cent on their shelter needs. Certainly, this bill will result in a rise in their bills and will make life more difficult for Albertans.

The minister in her comments said that the sector didn't ask for it. I think that when we moved towards the capacity market, experts, analysts, and the Alberta Electric System Operator were all on our side. That transition was welcomed by the TransAlta Corporation, Capital Power Corporation, AltaLink, Western Interstate Energy Board, and many others. So saying that nobody was asking for it, nobody was behind it: I don't think that's true. In 2016 AESO was recommending that we move towards the capacity market, and among many reasons the reason was that the capacity market will

ensure that Albertans have safe, reliable, sustainable, and affordable electricity. Clearly, our decision was based on advice from experts, on advice from AESO, and we worked with our producers, we worked with the sector to move towards the capacity market.

5:40

I think I will talk a little bit about how these two markets work, for the benefit of those who are listening. In an energy-only market I think those who generate electricity bid into the market pool the price that they want to sell the electricity at and the quantity that they can produce, and the system operator dispatches those units and merit orders based on the price until the generation matches the load of needed electricity. We know that the last unit of power that is dispatched, at whatever rate that unit is dispatched, sets the price that will be paid to all those who have bid into that market pool. That is determined on a per-hour basis.

Let's talk about administrative simplicity. Every hour that price will be determined, and that is the reason we see spikes. That is the reason we see fluctuation in our month-to-month electricity bill. It's the same product, but the price is determined every hour, not based on what it cost to generate electricity but based on what it can be sold at with the demand at any given hour.

As opposed to that, in a capacity market the producers are getting for what they are actually producing and delivering in the system. Also, in a capacity market, if needed, they can produce some. I think that Alberta is the only jurisdiction other than Texas, some states in Australia, and New Zealand, who uses this energy-only market. Everybody else has moved to some other form of market. For the most part the reason jurisdictions are moving away from an energy-only market is that the price is not stable. It doesn't give stability. It doesn't provide any stability for consumers, and they are subject to spikes because the price is determined every hour.

There are other things as well. I think that I would like to hear from the minister on those as well. The offer behaviour enforcement guidelines I think exist to ensure that a fair and efficient market exists, but those guidelines don't cover economic withholding. What that is and what that means is that sometimes generation is not offered at the price that it costs them to generate. Rather, they will bid on a sufficiently higher price and hope that they won't be called to run. What that does to the system is that then we see an offer price of \$999 per megawatt hour, pretty much the price cap that exists in the market. That also gives rise to spikes in the electricity prices.

Again, that economic withholding has been used to jack up the price and ensure that everybody else will be paid at the same price, but at the end of the day it will be the consumers who will end up paying for that, who will end up paying for those spikes. If I leave blackouts, even those who were in Calgary – we have seen those blackouts, and we have seen them even during the Stampede.

The second thing that I want to talk about is the price cap of a thousand dollars per megawatt hour. That's the cap that you can get right now in the system, in the pool. There are reports, there were discussions that in an energy-only market we will have to remove that cap, and some even suggest that that may go up to even \$5,000 and still may not guarantee that the lights will remain on.

So the question I have is: with the cancelling of this transition to a capacity market, will they be removing that cap and leaving Alberta consumers to the market forces and the per-hour price determination and spikes that were the case before this transition and are still the case? I think that if they remove that cap, Albertans may see their bills spike 10-fold.

The third thing. For consumers during the transition period we capped the electricity at 6.8 cents. When the minister announced the termination of the capacity market, she was asked multiple times

whether they will keep that cap for Albertans, and they were not sure whether that 6.8-cent cap will go on to make sure that Albertans have some certainty that they will not pay more than this. Again, if that cap is removed, Albertans will end up paying way more in electricity bills than they are paying right now.

Just in her remarks the minister said that we are fearmongering when we talk about spikes and blackouts, but then at the same time she mentioned that it's true that price spikes occur and that it's the function of energy-only markets. It means that we are not fearmongering. Rather, with her own admission, these spikes are the function of energy-only markets. That was the reason that we moved toward capacity markets. That decision was taken on the advice of experts, on the advice of AESO – that report, the 2016 report, is still out there – for the benefit of all Albertans so that they don't have to see spikes in their monthly bills. Most consumers will spend a certain amount of electricity every month. It's the same electricity, same producers, but they pay a different bill every month. These are called price spikes, and that's the function of an energy-only market. That was the reason that we were moving away from this energy-only market. I started by saying that this is more of the same. Some may benefit from moving back to an energy-only market, but we know that Albertans will pay, will be on the hook for their decision to revert to an energy-only market.

They said that they have consulted. They initially announced that they would consult for 90 days, but after 30 days those consultations were closed. The reason? Somehow they got an overwhelming response. We have asked who they consulted. I didn't hear from any constituent in Calgary-McCall that somehow the Minister of Energy or the Ministry of Energy reached out to them to ask if they wanted an energy-only market or a capacity market. I didn't hear from a single person in my riding, even during that time, that they were reached out to by the government. I didn't see those consultations with Albertans.

5:50

Had they been consulted and it had been explained that that's what a capacity market would do and that's what we were doing and that now you're reverting to the same old days when they saw the price spikes and rolling brownouts and blackouts, I think they would tell you that they are better off with a capacity market, that would have ensured safe, reliable, sustainable, and affordable electricity for them and some certainty for their energy bills every month. I think this decision, again, is one of those decisions because they said in the campaign that because it was done by the previous government and without any consideration whatsoever for Albertans, for everyday consumers, they are moving back to an energy-only market. At the end of the day that will make life more unaffordable for Albertans by adding to their monthly bills.

As far as the investment goes, I think that in 2018 for our renewable electricity program auctions there were no subsidies offered or anything, but the price at times was as low as 4.5 cents. They attracted the lowest priced electricity in our market. With that, because there was a clear indication that we wanted to move towards small, greener sources of electricity, there were tens of billions in private investment in the renewable sector. With this decision to move back to an energy-only market, I think that we are shutting doors on that investment that was coming through, seeing that the previous government was open to investing in and promoting renewable electricity. Sure, I do recognize that there are challenges with the capacity market in terms of forecasting for a year and longer durations, but those challenges do exist in the energy-only market as well because we are doing that forecasting on an hourly basis. With all that economic withholding and all those things I think prices can go up and have gone up in the past

considerably. We still remember price spikes in 2011-2012 in Calgary.

Again, I think we need to know whether that cap of 1,000 megawatt hours will remain or whether that will be removed as well, whether this government will protect consumers by keeping that 6.8-cent cap or not. These are the things that are important. These are the things that will impact everyday Albertans' bills. These are the things that will impact people in my constituency, and I think people need to know these answers. We need to know all these answers as well. At the end of the day we do know that we may not get any answers because this move is more ideological; this move is not based on any consultation or any research. Otherwise, the world is moving away from energy-only markets, and there are only three jurisdictions across the globe who follow this.

At the end I will say that this decision will impact consumers, and this move will move us away from getting more affordable and sustainable electricity through a capacity market. I will not be supporting this legislation.

Ms Issik: I notice that we are short on time, so I'm not going to give the speech that I intended to. However, I will address some of the issues that were just raised by the member across. First of all, Alberta has a good history of 20-plus years in the energy-only market. It has worked very, very well for us. Now, we may be one of few jurisdictions that operate under this system, but I can tell you that it has a good history. Others did not move away from an energy-only system; if they did go to a capacity system, it was usually from an only-contract system, which is very, very costly.

The capacity market relies entirely on crystal ball forecasting. I think that it's important for us to realize that when we take market forces out of play and rely on a crystal ball for demand forecasting, we often get it wrong, and that ends up costing consumers an awful lot more than what you're going to see in an energy-only market. At the end of the day, when we talk about consumers paying the price, I'd like to point out that the previous government, when they took office, put in the carbon levy without consulting Albertans, which set off the PPA crisis, costing us, I think, about \$1.8 billion. Who's going to pay that? That will be Albertans.

Then they decided to accelerate the coal-fired generation shutdown, that they now won't even admit to. They want to blame it on Stephen Harper, but they actually accelerated it and caused yet another crisis. That's when the capacity market became a brilliant idea so that they could bring on more renewable energy faster. What do you think? Guess who's going to pay for that? Ratepayers.

At the end of the day, as they tried to make up for the shortage in supply that they created by shutting down coal at an accelerated rate, what did they do? Cap the price. We subsidized it with loans from the government of Alberta. Guess who's paying for that? Who's going to end up paying for it? Ratepayers. I don't think the members opposite should be lecturing anybody on protecting ratepayers because they did more damage to ratepayers than anyone could possibly imagine.

We consulted widely, and it was amazing the amount of agreement that was put forth in terms of moving and keeping the energy-only market. It was almost unanimous. At the end of the day ratepayers who are worried about price spikes will be able, as they are now, to buy into contracts that will protect them from that. There is protection for ratepayers there already.

I'm going to point out, though, that right now we are operating with a 30 per cent surplus margin. We're not going to run out of supply any time soon. What we did by keeping the energy-only market and not moving to a capacity market is that we created certainty for investors, and that has been an absolute boon for the renewables industry. There are more wind producers and solar

producers wanting to come here now than there ever were. That green power is going to do amazing things for our economy. It's going to help us diversify our economy. In fact, I predict that renewables will actually bring diversified businesses to Alberta. They're coming here because of the energy-only market.

The market force does work. Government does not have to do everything. Consumers will benefit. Our economy will be diversified, and our grid will be greener than it's ever been. I'm really happy that we've been able to keep the energy-only market. I'm happy that our

consultations resulted in the consent from the industry and consumers and distributors and retailers that we required, that we wanted to see. It was there. Consumers will benefit.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, but the time is now 6 o'clock. As such, debate has concluded for this afternoon, and the House stands adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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