



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, December 7, 2015

Day 29

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)	Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND), Government House Leader
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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)	McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND), Deputy Government Whip
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND), Deputy Government House Leader	McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
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Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)	Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
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Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)	Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND), Premier
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)	Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W), Official Opposition House Leader	Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)	Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)	Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)	Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)	Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)	Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND), Government Whip
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)	Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)	Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)	Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)	Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader	Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
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Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W), Leader of the Official Opposition	Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)	
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)	

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, December 7, 2015

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Private Bills Second Reading

Bill Pr. 1

The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Mason: Hi, Madam Speaker. I'll move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to this bill?
Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 2

Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, I'll move second reading of Bill Pr. 2, Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to this bill?
I see none.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 3

Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, I move second reading of Bill Pr. 3, Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to the bill in second reading?
I see none.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 4

Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015 (a)

Mr. Orr: Madam Speaker, I move second reading of Bill Pr. 4, Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to this bill?
I see none.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 4 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 5

Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, I'll move second reading of Bill Pr. 5, Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to the bill in second reading?
I see none.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 5 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 6

Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Please bear with me. It's my first time going through this. I move second reading of Bill Pr. 6.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to this bill?
I see none.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 6 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 7

Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, I move second reading of Bill Pr. 7, Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to the bill?
I see none.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 7 read a second time]

Private Bills Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

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

Bill Pr. 1

The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: Hon. members, we have under consideration Bill Pr. 1. Are there any questions, comments or amendments with respect to this bill? Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill Pr. 1, The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015 be amended as follows. Section 7 is amended in the proposed section 6 by striking out clause (a) and substituting the following:

has authority to provide programs of study, approved in accordance with the Post-secondary Learning Act and the regulations made under that Act, that lead to the granting of baccalaureate, master's and doctoral degrees; to provide institutionally approved programs of study that lead to the granting of diplomas and certificates;

I have a sum total of one copy of the amendment. Oh, hey, look at that. The script doesn't tell me where to stop speaking, so do I just fill the time until . . . [interjections] I'm going to filibuster my own bill, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions regarding the proposed amendment?
I see none.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We are back now on the main bill as amended. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill Pr. 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

7:40

Bill Pr. 2
Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: All righty. Moving on. Are there any questions, comments or amendments with respect to this bill?

I see none.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's carried. [interjection] Opposed? I figured everybody was in agreement, so I didn't ask "Opposed?" What can I say?

Bill Pr. 3
Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act

The Chair: All right. Moving on to Bill Pr. 3. Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

I see none.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? That's carried. We're getting there.

Bill Pr. 4
Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: On Bill Pr. 4. Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill Pr. 5
**Concordia University College of Alberta
Amendment Act, 2015**

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and move an amendment to Bill Pr. 5 on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Varsity. This bill was reviewed by the Standing

Committee on Private Bills, and the committee recommended that the bill proceed with this amendment, being as follows. Section 6 is amended in the proposed section 4(1) by striking out clause (c) and substituting the following:

- (c) to provide programs of study, approved in accordance with the Post-secondary Learning Act and the regulations made under that Act, that lead to the granting of baccalaureate, master's and doctoral degrees.

The copies of the amendment are being distributed.

The Chair: All right. On amendment A1 to Bill Pr. 5, are there any speakers with respect to this bill?

Mr. Cooper: I just would love a moment or two to have the amendment in my hand prior to the vote.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I will rest.

The Chair: You're welcome. Thank you.

All right. Everyone now has the amendment. Are there any questions or comments with respect to the amendment?

I see none.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: On Bill Pr. 5, are there any further speakers, questions or comments, amendments?

Seeing none, get ready for the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill Pr. 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill Pr. 6
Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: We are now on Bill Pr. 6. Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 6 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill Pr. 7
Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: Finally, Bill Pr. 7. Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

**Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

Bill 7

Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I will be relatively brief. It's a pleasure for me to rise to speak to Bill 7 in committee and to outline my personal pleasure in the fact that our government has been able to move forward on this bill as quickly as we have. I'm also, of course, very pleased with the level of support that it is now receiving throughout this Assembly as we move forward on this bill.

You know, it's interesting, going back to when I was first elected, in 2008, Madam Chair. At that time, the big get in our human rights legislation was to get the legislation to actually include reference to sexual orientation. Soon after I was elected, we celebrated – celebrated, in quotations marks – the anniversary of the Vriend decision, when the Supreme Court of Canada essentially told the previous government of Alberta that it had to read in protection for people on the basis of sexual orientation. That was a wonderful decision, but, notwithstanding that, it took over a decade for the previous government to move and actually have that language included in the human rights legislation, and that was unfortunate.

In fact, even when it did finally get introduced – some people here, being rather new to the House, might not recall – it was paired with the rather unfortunate section 11.1 of the bill that brought in sexual orientation, which allowed for all that weirdness where teachers could be disciplined were they to talk about sexual orientation in classrooms without first having gone through a rather laborious process to get permission and to warn everybody that that topic might possibly come up. It's a pleasure to see that we've moved such a long way from that.

Instead, in our case, you know, our government has been in office now for just over seven months, and assuming that we pass this bill in this session, it will be before eight months that we're able to move to that point of including the issue of protecting Albertans on the basis of gender, gender identity, and gender expression. While we know that it would be read in by the Supreme Court of Canada anyway, it is highly symbolic not just to Albertans who need their rights protected on the basis of gender, gender identity, and gender expression, but quite frankly it is symbolic to all Albertans who care about human rights and care about the actualization of protecting critical human rights and the rights of minorities each and every day in our province. That's what this bill does.

I'm very pleased that the Minister of Justice worked very hard to ensure that this bill came forward as soon as we could bring it forward. I want to thank her for that. Of course, I want to thank the many members of caucus who've worked so hard as well to advocate for this bill and who have spoken in favour of it and again thank my colleagues across the way for their support of this bill. I think it matters a great deal to, as I say, all Albertans who care about protecting the rights of minorities, particularly those Albertans who find themselves in positions where they suffer discrimination as a result of their gender identity and gender expression.

I'll finally just end on the fact that it really is so incredibly refreshing to see the differences amongst our young people. If there are people, perhaps not in this House but still across the province, who are nervous or uncomfortable with this, all you need to do is go, frankly, to most schools now and walk down the halls and see

that the majority of kids get it now. The reason they do is because we talk about it and we make it real through doing things like including this in the legislation. Certainly, when I talk to my kids, it's just so amazing how far they've come compared to where I was, many, many years ago when I was in school.

So we can make progress as a community. It doesn't just happen with young people; it happens with people changing the way they view things, understanding the importance of protecting minorities, understanding the importance of people being able to be who they are, express who they are, live who they are without fear of repercussions. I'm so pleased that we now will have legislation that ensures that here in Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

7:50

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Again, it's my great pleasure in standing to support this bill and give credit and congratulations to the Justice minister. This was timely, this was needed, this was very welcome to, I think, most Albertans now, in the 21st century needing to see evidence that we actually will enshrine some of the uniqueness that is now identified as not abnormal, not bizarre, not in any way to be condemned or treated. Even the medical profession, unfortunately, over some decades – it's not been a decade that it's not been considered an anomaly or an illness or a disorder needing treatment.

Fortunately, we have come into a new age in understanding gender issues, gender identification and ambiguity, and the range of issues that have to do with how we identify ourselves. It's been a real education for me, too, going through this, having grown up in the '60s and having seen and experienced a lot of the prejudice in my own family and now having several members of my family who are ambiguous, gay, lesbian, not yet transgendered as far as we know, but it's quite okay.

I've hesitated to bring forward an amendment simply because I did not want to in any way distract from the main focus of this bill, the recognition under the Human Rights Act that gender identity, gender expression have to be singularly spelled out, but I thought it would be good for us to have this discussion around, in this case, aboriginal heritage. I think that although it's not identified specifically, this may be the only chance we get in the next decade to look at the human rights code and ensure that it's very clear that we are protecting aboriginal heritage as a prohibited grounds of discrimination.

I hear, especially in this mental health review, that there are a lot of people that feel the effects of racism and have somehow lost confidence in government to protect their rights. I will pass out the amendment and chat a little bit about it so that we can move along, having said that that is another dimension of the Human Rights Act that I think people sense is there, but it isn't explicit that aboriginal heritage would be a prohibited grounds for discrimination.

I can tell you that almost every First Nations, Métis, or Inuit person that I talk to feels that they are being discriminated against. Whether it's in school, in the workplace, in other venues, there is a sense that aboriginal heritage is somehow a disadvantage for them in the lives that they lead. People tell me they feel discriminated against in the health care system, which is absolutely unacceptable to me as a health care professional.

If it's not explicit, then maybe since this is one of the rare times that we will be opening this act, it's an opportunity for us to show it in a very clear way, as this Premier and this government have tried to do. To ensure that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit are clearly given a high priority by this government, we are going to honour

the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous persons. We are going to revisit the whole TRC, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and ensure that we bring forward some of the recommendations around that to all levels of government, all levels of society, be serious about the reconciliation process, that is so needed if we're going to move our First Nations people to the forefront of healing and reconciliation with our society.

This is an opportunity, I guess, while we have this bill open, to recognize something that may have been an oversight. I think it's assumed in the existing human rights code. It's not explicit, just like transgendered was not explicit. We could, I think, make this a little more explicit, send a message, and let everyone in this society know that this is an important area of consideration and reconsideration for many of us, to think about the way that we treat our First Nations people.

I won't say anymore. I want to hear the debate. We've singled out transgendered because it, too, needed to be highlighted. In my view, aboriginal heritage is just one of a number of areas, and by singling it out, we highlight it, we say it's important, and we register it on the minds of Albertans, that maybe it's something that we haven't taken quite as seriously as we should if we really want to see healing and success in our First Nations community. Any ways that we can find to highlight them and encourage their full participation and feel that we're there to protect those rights in a very explicit way, I think, would be to all of our benefit.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any speakers to amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to this amendment. We are somewhat surprised by its arrival. I think that the intention behind it is absolutely noble. I'm somewhat confused because this particular ground would be subsumed into at least one if not two other grounds which are already listed in the Human Rights Act, so that has confused me somewhat.

I do absolutely think that the hon. member is correct. Indigenous people in this province suffer a great deal of discrimination, and there continues to be, I think, even at this time a substantial sort of disparity in terms of educational attainment and a number of other things.

I guess my question to the hon. member would be why he thinks it's important to include this explicitly given that it's already covered under additional grounds and, in addition, why he thinks we want to move forward with this at this exact moment without consultation. Of course, we had considerable consultation on the amendments we were moving. Those would be my questions for the hon. member.

Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you. Madam Chair, again, I guess it's an oversight that we didn't send this around earlier to give a chance to discuss it. I do not in any way want to detract from the importance of the transgendered identification in this addition.

What I don't see in the Human Rights Act is an explicit statement about aboriginal heritage. By explicitly stating it, I think we would gain not only awareness in our population, confronting a very blatant issue, probably one of the more unfortunate aspects continuing in our society; it would also send a very strong message to First Nations that we honour that, and we are going to champion it, and we are going to make it so that it's not ambiguous in any way by saying that on the basis of ethnicity, which is the way the act currently reads – discrimination on the basis of ethnicity is not specific enough as far as I'm concerned.

For the indigenous people in this province and this country, many of them there is a strong sense that this is not good enough. This is not clear, and in practice it is certainly not something that they have been successful or even chosen to take to the Human Rights Commission. Apparently, given that there have been no cases, that I'm aware of, brought forward to the Human Rights Commission, they don't feel that it's worth while.

8:00

I think it's an opportunity to send a much stronger message than we have about our respect and willingness to single out First Nations, who have not seen improvement in the last few decades in terms of the protection of their human rights. I don't think there's anything to be lost by adding this. It just simply makes something more explicit that has not been as explicit as I think it should be.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Well, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has proposed an amendment to the bill, which is in itself an amendment to the Human Rights Act, which is specifically to deal with gender, gender identity, and gender expression, and he's added an additional category; specifically, "aboriginal." Now, there are some concerns, and quite frankly we could have probably dealt with these concerns had we known that this amendment was coming.

First of all, with respect to the word "aboriginal" the government has adopted the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. The preferred word with respect to that policy is "indigenous" as opposed to "aboriginal." That's one point.

Secondly, there's the question of singling out one particular group. The act clearly contains protection on the basis of ancestry and of race. There's, I think, a risk here of starting to add individual groups within that when it's clearly covered.

While we think that the intent of the hon. member is very honourable and we can certainly see the good that he is trying to achieve through this amendment, it is unfortunately catching us by surprise. There are some outstanding issues that would need to be sorted through before we could support this amendment at this time. With appreciation to the hon. member and the greatest of respect for his intentions, unfortunately we're not in a position to support this amendment at this time.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just rise very briefly to echo some of the same sorts of concerns – and I know we might want to circle the calendar – that the Government House Leader just provided to the Assembly. I think that the intent is quite noble, and certainly there is lots that can be done around this issue. But I think that in light of just receiving the amendment and some of the other risks and challenges that it may pose, I would suggest that while I and quite likely many of my hon. colleagues on this side of the House appreciate the intent of the work that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View was intending to deliver, at this time I think it would be better if we revisited this in the future and possibly had a bit more of a fulsome discussion on some of the nuances around challenges that he has specifically identified.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, we will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Madam Chair. We've spoken a lot about consultation lately in this Chamber, so I would like to ask my colleagues in the Official Opposition a few questions, starting with: who did they consult with about Bill 7? Have they spoken with their constituents or the party executive? Have they spoken with a single trans or gender-diverse person about this bill or, for that matter, ever? Do you they know why this bill is so important for an entire community? Do they know what the concerns of this community are and why they're being told to vote for this bill? Finally, why did the Leader of the Official Opposition vote against an identical bill, Bill C-279, only two years ago, when he was in Ottawa?

The fact that the Leader of the Official Opposition stated only last week that transgender and gender-diverse Albertans should have the right to choose their gender shows a complete lack of understanding of an entire community, that the Official Opposition chooses to now support. Only one member of the Official Opposition has spoken to Bill 7 thus far, and when that member was asked if his support for the bill was echoed by his party and their grassroots, he remained silent. Well, I'm happy to say, Madam Chair, that this whole caucus and the entire Alberta NDP supports the trans and gender-diverse community, and we will continue to fight for their human rights, which are so often dismissed and forgotten. I look forward to my colleagues, hopefully, answering some of these questions, especially the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I might just rise and point out that the bill received significant support from all members on this side of the House, and I look forward to moving the bill forward as expediently as possible.

The Chair: Any further comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just rise very briefly to sort of outline what it is that this bill does. I'm honoured to rise to speak to it today. This bill adds gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds for discrimination. For clarity and for the sake of the record, gender identity refers to a person's internal, individual experience of gender, and gender expression refers to the varied ways in which a person expresses their gender through a combination of dress, demeanour, social behaviour, and other factors. Protection from discrimination on the basis of both grounds is relevant for trans and gender-variant people. Their gender identity and expression may differ from the sex that they were assigned at birth.

In summary, Bill 7 amends the list of prohibited grounds as well as the preamble and the educational mandate of the tribunal to expressly include gender identity and expression. There are numerous sections within the act that deal with prohibited grounds.

Madam Chair, we have consulted with members of the trans and gender-variant community. We know that these individuals feel that having their gender identity and gender expression expressly listed in the act will promote awareness and understanding of the issues they face on a daily basis. We believe it will empower them to confront the stereotypes and discrimination that we know still exist today. Madam Chair, no one should have to fear being who they are.

The Alberta Human Rights Commission is supportive of this update. Madam Chair, the government is committed to upholding the rights of all Albertans. We know that this bill makes trans and gender-variant people feel more welcome in this province. We have heard concerns from members of the trans and gender-variant community, and Bill 7 is one way that we're acting to help address those concerns now although we must take more in the future.

Madam Chair, this is a historic step forward, and I would encourage all members to support this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments to the bill?

Dr. Swann: I was just going to ask – and there was someone else who was ready to speak, too – whether we could move to one-minute bells.

The Chair: No. Unfortunately, the way the standing orders are written, the first bells always have to be 15 minutes, and then subsequent bells are always one minute automatically. That gives everybody the opportunity to know that the members have been called in.

Hon. member, go ahead.

8:10

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I appreciate this opportunity to speak to something which is so significant and very important and allows us all to take one of those profound and significant steps forward in our world, where we take the ideas that we've been building for literally hundreds of years under the Magna Carta and move them forward. I'm delighted to be here to speak to Bill 7, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015.

I was happy to hear Premier Notley refer to the Vriend decision and how that was a transformative moment. I have a personal relationship with that decision as I shared space in a co-op house with Mr. Vriend just at the time of the decision. Having met him and admired his determination to stand up and to be counted, I'm happy to hear that his work is being acknowledged yet again these many years later.

I wish to move on and speak about the issue of providing rights for transgendered individuals in the community because this issue has touched my own life in a variety of ways. As a therapist working with people who have experienced a variety of forms of trauma, I did encounter a number of people who were in the process of discovering their own identity and making courageous decisions to move forward, and I supported them as they underwent various forms of transition, including surgery.

As well, I had the opportunity to support students at the university who were undergoing the same kinds of transitions. Actually, I was privileged to witness that moment when a student makes a decision to, for the very first time, declare who they are to a whole class of 30 people and to watch that class receive that statement with openness and warmth in a way that would not have been seen many years ago and to assist that student to process their emotional work with the class as they made their decisions and changes and moved on. Now, I have run into that student in the community and have seen how their life has been so fulfilled by following up on that courageous decision and how all of the grief that they experienced at one point in their life, including having their life threatened by their own parent, was now put aside, and they were moving on in just a beautiful way to contribute to the community, fulfilling themselves and fulfilling beautiful roles in the province of Alberta.

Thirdly, it's touched my life in that I have someone very close to me, someone who I have deep love for, who is just now beginning this process, and it's just great to feel like this is happening in a new

era, in a new place, a new time, when we can embrace this moment and celebrate it and go through this journey, just like we go through so many other journeys with the people in our lives.

Having had this touch my life in so many different ways, I can tell you that it is both joyfully and with some sadness that I stand today because I know, from my experience with all of these people, that they have had to go through so much unnecessarily up to this point. They've had their lives threatened. They've had their families reject them. They have become addicted to various substances or even to self-abuse. I'm just thrilled that we're part of the message to these people that none of that is necessary anymore and that we're moving on, away from all of those terrible statistics that we heard last week about people who have experienced this: the fact that the average income of people, individuals in the trans community, is below the poverty line, approximately \$15,000 a year; the fact that about 77 per cent of these individuals have considered suicide and 43 per cent of them actually have tried to commit suicide; and that 20 per cent of them have experienced physical and sexual assault just for being who they are. They're terrible statistics, and I know they're only numbers, but I can assure you, having been present in heart-wrenching therapeutic sessions and conversations with people closer to me, that those are not just statistics; they are traumatically disgusting and awful numbers.

Recently I had the opportunity to attend the Transgender Day of Remembrance here in Edmonton and was deeply saddened to learn that they were going to read out 270 names of people who had been killed largely as a consequence of the transgender reality, so much so that I didn't stay till the end. With some shame I say that, but it was an unbearable horror, like listening to a listing of names from Auschwitz or one of the other tragedies that we have experienced in our history. While I have that sadness, I also have the joy: here we are. As Premier Notley said: we're having a very different discussion about this now. We are moving forward, and we're embracing all of those people from gender and sexual and romantic minorities.

I'd like to pause for a moment and say thank you to the groups that have been working on this issue relentlessly for decades. There are many I can point out, but I've had some involvement particularly with the Pride Centre of Edmonton, so I just want to take this moment to do a quick shout-out to the Pride Centre and tell you that while they have done this profound work, they are continuing to struggle financially. I'd like to take this moment to encourage everyone who listens to consider donations to the Pride Centre, support to the Pride Centre, whether it be the Edmonton one or the similar centres in Calgary or outside of the major cities.

This is really a profound change for all of us. One of the things I learned, many years ago, is that when we make a significant and important change for one group of people, it really isn't just about that one group of people. It's really about all of us and how it expands our lives and our world and how each of us then lives a different form of life than we would have if we'd allowed one of our brothers or sisters to live a diminished life.

I'm reminded of a man named Pierre Garipey, who worked with the CPA. He was injured during the Second World War, a spinal injury, and was in a wheelchair from that time, came to Edmonton, where he married, adopted and raised beautiful children, and helped to raise a grandchild who I now call my son. He was a wonderful man, and I'm reminded of him because he is the fellow, amongst many, who came to the city of Edmonton and asked the city of Edmonton: would you please put curb cuts on all the corners so I can get my wheelchair up and down? At the time he was admonished for wanting to waste public monies and do terrible things and cause nothing but grief and slow down the process of construction.

Nowadays, how many of you have stopped at a street corner and thought, "That's a waste of money"? None of you, I'm sure. What you have done, though, is that you've used those cuts in spite of the fact they were built for one community, people in wheelchairs. Now they're used by everyone with a stroller, everyone wheeling their bicycle along, everyone who has difficulty stepping up onto a curb. As we expand the rights and recognize the reality of some people, we expand our own understanding of who we are as human beings, and it is a good thing for all of us.

I'd just like to finish by thanking everyone in this House who has offered support, including the Official Opposition, who has provided some unanimous support for Bill 7. I want to thank you for the respect you're showing for gender diversity as an expression of human diversity. I want to also thank the Wildrose for their support of the notion of gender diversity and gender fluidity, that they exist and that they need to be recognized and that they need to be supported. I would like to thank the Wildrose for their support of the right of children and youth to be affirmed as the gender that they understand themselves to be rather than the one that they were assigned at birth.

Thank you for the support for all of these ideas and notions and to everyone else in the House as well. Thank you very much.

8:20

The Chair: Thank you. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, just a reminder that we do not use proper names in the House.

Mr. Feehan: I'm sorry?

The Chair: We don't use proper names in the House.

Mr. Feehan: Oh, I am sorry.

The Chair: Just a reminder.

Mr. Feehan: Yes. I apologize. You may withdraw that.

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my pleasure to stand today briefly and speak in support of Bill 7. I just want to share a bit of a different perspective than perhaps some have been sharing. I grew up in a family where trans rights would not have been defended, and I grew up where it was not okay to pass judgment on most things. However, it was okay, seemingly, to pass judgment on those of other races, religions, women, and, sadly, the LGBTQ community. Thankfully, I did not take that with me as I grew up, and I've come to really appreciate the saying that you rise above your raising sometimes. I was really glad to be able to rise above my raising.

I stand proudly in this House to help defend trans rights, to do my small part in being able to help with that cause. I know that some are more ready than others in their journey towards the acceptance of others and, lots of us, towards self-acceptance. I know that this will be one more step for all of us down this road together, but I know that it is one meaningful step that we can take as a province.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other comments, questions, or amendments to the bill?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I'll move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: bills Pr. 2, Pr. 3, Pr. 4, Pr. 6, Pr. 7, Bill 7. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: bills Pr. 1, Pr. 5. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 7

Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and move third reading of Bill 7, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015, which would add gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination in the Alberta Human Rights Act. I would like to thank the hon. members for their unanimous support of this bill. It was clear to me, while listening to the sincere and positive comments of support from all parties, that our province's shared sense of justice and inclusiveness is reflected in these amendments. I would also like to thank the hon. members who shared with the Assembly their very moving personal experiences.

Madam Speaker, no one should ever be denied basic services or be singled out simply for being true to themselves. By including gender identity and gender expression in the Alberta Human Rights Act, we would be doing more than clarifying an essential piece of legislation. This amendment would empower trans and gender-variant Albertans to confront discrimination that we know continues to exist within our society. It would reinforce the promise of the Alberta Human Rights Act, that everyone who calls this great province home is ensured fair treatment and equal rights regardless of who they are.

Madam Speaker, I commend the Assembly for its support. This is an important step in terms of standing up for Albertans. This bill is an opportunity to send a clear and powerful message that no one should be afraid to walk down the street or go to school, that no one should worry about being fired or refused medical treatment simply because they express who they are. Most importantly, it's an opportunity to say to our family members, friends, colleagues, and neighbours: love who you are, and know that you are loved because of who you are.

Madam Speaker, in the name of acceptance, equality, and diversity I ask all hon. members for their support in moving Bill 7

through third reading. Going forward, we know there needs to be more done to support trans and gender-variant people, specifically in regard to changing perceptions and attitudes, raising public awareness, and sweeping aside harmful stereotypes. Today we take a big step forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to the bill in third reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just very, very briefly, it is remarkable how far this Assembly has come in what seems like a short period of time, that we're all here on the same side. It all seems relatively easy to be where we are here today, but this day is hard won, especially by those who join us here in the gallery today and so many others. I think it's very important that we acknowledge that. I just wanted to rise here at third reading and acknowledge the tremendous respect I have for the work that you have done and the work that so many others have done to blaze this path and acknowledge the work that remains. There is still work to do.

I think, most notably, we've seen the steps that the Minister of Education has had to take, and I encourage him to continue down that path. Should the imposition of policies on certain school boards to recognize gender expression and gender identity be required, I certainly encourage the Minister of Education to do so. I think that would be very much in keeping and consistent with what we've heard tonight.

With that, I will end my comments and thank the House again for its unanimous approval of this very important bill.

8:30

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will keep my remarks brief. Well, it's getting late, and I'm only getting started. I believe we have a very long evening, potentially, ahead of us tonight, so I'm not going to speak long to this. I'll save most of my comments for the rigorous debate we can expect this evening.

I wanted to add my voice to all members of this House that this is the kind of thing that we can work together on, the kind of thing we should not attempt to politicize. It's the kind of thing that Albertans want us to do regardless of our party stripes. I know I've met independent members and members of the government side, Progressive Conservatives at the Strathmore Rocky Mountain international rodeo, great events that bring people together. [some applause] Oh, that was unique applause. It's always interesting when I get applauded by the government members.

I'll keep my remarks on this brief, but I wanted to add my voice to something that I'm so proud to see all members of the House support and that I believe we're going to pass unanimously tonight. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Justice to close debate.

Ms Ganley: Thank you again, Madam Speaker. I will simply close by saying that I think this is a fantastic step forward for all Albertans. I'm thrilled to have unanimous support in the House on this bill, and I think that we have made Alberta a more welcoming place for everyone who lives here. I'm just thrilled.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 7 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'll call the committee to order. Just before we start, I need to clarify this 15-minute division bell thing for the members. The first one always has to be 15 minutes, but the subsequent ones are one minute only with respect to the bill that is under consideration. If we move on to a new bill, it goes back to, again, the 15 minutes, one minute. If we want to do a motion to shorten the bells after the first 15-minute bell for the rest of the evening, we can do so. Does that make sense?

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I'm just curious. It's my understanding that an exception to the standing orders can always be made with unanimous consent. Is that not the case here?

The Chair: Not in Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Mason: Oh, okay. I didn't know that.

Bill 4

**An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and
to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act**

The Chair: Are there any further amendments, questions, or comments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, that's my cue, Madam Chair. I'm thrilled to continue our fulsome debate on Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. This is an act that replaces the Fiscal Management Act, the Fiscal Management Act having replaced the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Government Accountability Act. We've put forward so far a series of amendments: five amendments from the Official Opposition, one amendment from the fifth party, and one amendment from the third party.

Our goal in these amendments has been to put forward constructive improvements to the legislation. Our goal has been, as I put it in the opening part of this debate between the leader of the third party and myself, to make the legislation less bad. We've spoken about the broad strokes of this legislation, that I believe it is fiscally irresponsible . . .

Mr. Cooper: Totally irresponsible.

Mr. Fildebrandt: . . . totally fiscally irresponsible, that it is reckless, that it is asking the members of the Legislature for a blank cheque, that it is omnibus.

It touches on the budgetary framework of the government, its very structure around borrowing, financing, deficit rules, debt rules. It also includes in it various tax measures, as the title enthusiastically points out: measures to raise insurance taxes – I'm not sure why we would want to be doing that to begin with – measures to raise tobacco taxes, perhaps a little less controversial; measures to raise beer taxes, that is a bit more controversial with some members, I'd imagine; measures to raise locomotive taxes. It's a very far-reaching piece of legislation that no self-respecting fiscal conservative or even mildly fiscally responsible person could ever hope to vote for. It's a piece of legislation that we as legislators have a responsibility to examine in-depth, carefully, line by line.

I remember being in the technical briefing for Bill 4, approaching a month ago, a few weeks ago at least, with the Department of

Finance's bureaucrats, who sat down the Official Opposition, the third party, and the fifth party and ran through the legislation. I recall there being a few small improvements, particularly in the area of tightening up the language around quarterly reporting, language that had been significantly watered down when the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Government Accountability Act were repealed. The repeal of those two acts is a day that will live in infamy for many a fiscal conservative in Alberta because it really put us on the wrong track.

The bill positively firms up some of the language around quarterly reporting but then goes in entirely the wrong direction. So we've begun to put forward a series of amendments to try to make the legislation less worse.

8:40

An Hon. Member: Thank God for us.

Mr. Fildebrandt: We're just here to help. We're here to help all night long.

We put forward an amendment that would tighten up the rules around the use of the contingency account, once named the sustainability fund. I suppose it became embarrassing for the government to refer to something as a sustainability fund when it was nearly out of money, so it had been renamed. Our goal had been to tighten up the language and the rules around the use of the contingency account so that the contingency account could be used for what it was originally intended to be used for; that is, covering off short-term cyclical deficits, where there would be an emergency or there would be a significant economic disruption. In those cases it would be unfortunate but sometimes necessary to run a limited and short-term deficit.

The sustainability fund had grown to such a level, \$17 billion at one point, and the level of the sustainability fund allowed the government, beginning in 2008, to run deficits, perhaps reasonably at first, but those deficits never seemed to stop. It went to one year, two years, four, six. We've now completed eight years of deficits in the province, at least deficits as we once defined them here, that we have been spending more money than we've been bringing in, that our net financial assets have been on the decline for some time. We wanted to tighten up the rules around the contingency account so that use of the contingency account would be limited to short-term cyclical deficits, not long-term structural deficits, as we now find ourselves in. Unfortunately, the government did not see fit to support the amendment.

We tried to bring some sensibility to the debt ceiling that's been proposed. Once upon a time Alberta was debt free. That was something for every single Albertan to be proud of. It was something that every single Albertan could be justifiably proud of when they talked to someone from Quebec or Ontario or British Columbia. Everybody across the country remembers the front page of the *Herald* and Postmedia outlets from coast to coast with Ralph Klein's beaming smile, holding a paid-in-full sign over his head. We were justifiably proud. It had been hard work to get there. It required sacrifice. It required toughness. It required grit. It required political courage. It required a government willing to say no. It required a government willing to clean up the mistakes of the past and not compound them further. I believe that's what we're seeing today.

Sure, there's plenty of blame to go around for the previous government. I've talked about it for years. I've made a living out of it. In some ways I'm still making a living off it, but I'm trying to limit that. There's plenty of blame to go around, and I'm sure there'll be a time to talk about that, but I think that rather than focus only on the sins of the past, we need to look at how we fix the future.

To say that the last government took on lots of debt would be accurate, but it would be irresponsible to say that we should just keep on doing so because, hey, that's what we were already doing. How bad can we be?

When this government took office, the sustainability fund was about to run out. The debt, the exact debt on the debt clock, stood at \$14 billion and was projected to continue running up. The previous government had projected deficits, as defined by net change in financial assets, of \$6 billion to \$7 billion, and it was a bad spot to be left in, but it is our job to fix it moving forward, not to merely shrug our shoulders at how the past had been managed and say: well, that's not our fault, and we're going to continue doing what we're doing; in fact, we'll accelerate how fast we're going.

Well, once upon a time we had been debt free, and the province had legally banned debt. The province had made reasonable changes for financing of infrastructure through P3s and very limited borrowing for assets like toll roads that earned a cash return, smart business investments. Unfortunately, it didn't stay there for all that long. The borrowing of the province began to spin out of control. It began to go off the rails. Our debt laws in the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Government Accountability Act were gradually loosened and loosened and loosened until eventually a Premier said that debt was not regrettable but that it was hope, and so much hope we now have. We're drowning in hope. We have to check the debt clock. I print it off about every week or so. I come into the office. I go to debtclock.ca, and I look at the screen. It makes me very, very sad. I click Print Screen, and it comes off, and I tape it to the wall right behind my chair, and it reminds me what we're doing, what we're fighting for every week: to stop that bloody clock, to make it go away.

I remember being in Medicine Hat – yes, you can plug Medicine Hat – in the summer of I think 2014, where I stood beside then two Wildrose members from Medicine Hat as they signed pledges. We called it the balanced budget and debt-free Alberta pledge. The Member for Medicine Hat and the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat put their signatures to that pledge standing in front of the debt clock underneath a giant teepee.

An Hon. Member: It was a nice teepee.

Mr. Fildebrandt: It was a nice teepee, I agree.

It was a nice photo op, but, you know, perhaps one of the people who signed the pledge thought it was just a photo op. Another one took it very seriously, and he's standing right beside me today. I'm very proud to have him here. He's a guy who stood beside his principles and has been fighting for fiscal conservatism through the darkest days of the conservative movement in Alberta, when there were only a small handful of members who would stand up in this House and fight against reckless tax increases, who would fight against continually taking on debt, who would fight to live by the pledge that they had signed. When they had inked their signatures on that pledge, they were willing to stand up and fight for it. Because they were willing to fight for it through that dark period, we're able to be here today in greater numbers than ever, fighting for it.

8:50

To that, we put forward an amendment to lower the proposed new debt ceiling from the 15 per cent that the Minister of Finance has proposed in this bill down to a still very high but, I believe, much more reasonable 7 per cent. That would have been a \$25 billion, roughly, debt ceiling. The government in its wisdom and spirit of co-operation decided that that amendment would just not do, that \$25 billion of debt would not be enough but that they would have

to run up \$50 billion in debt. You know, every time I say "\$50 billion," I feel I just need to put my pinky to my mouth and say: \$50 billion; \$50 billion of debt. I just can't get tired of doing that. It is truly something Dr. Evil would do, to take on \$50 billion of debt and make his poor kid pay for it. But I'm here to tell you that the international caucus of mystery is here to fight against Dr. Evil. I think that's Scotty in the back who's going to pay for it.

Mr. Cooper: Do we have the power?

Mr. Fildebrandt: We certainly have the power to fight against raising the debt ceiling, and we're going to fight against it all night long if we have to. Unfortunately, the government has not managed to see things the way that the fiscal conservatives on this side do, so I'll take this opportunity to do you all a favour and present another amendment to make this bill less bad. I love my job, Madam Chair. I love making bills less bad. One day I'd like to just write a good one from scratch, but we'll have to wait three and a half years for that.

With that, I will hand this out.

The Chair: This will be amendment A8.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll speak to this in some more detail as the evening goes on. In short, to keep my remarks brief – it is getting on, but it'll probably get later – this is to ensure accountability in this year's quarterly update. It was discussed earlier that improvements have been made in some of the quarterly reporting aspects here. I like to give credit where credit is due. It's probably a habit that I'm going to have to work myself out of in politics eventually, but I want to give credit to the government where credit is due, that they are a few minor tinkering in quarterly reporting, but we seem to have missed a quarterly report this year. That's against the law. I generally don't think that politicians should be allowed to break the laws that they make, and that is why, as I've got five seconds left, I want to put forward an amendment that corrects that error.

The Chair: Before I recognize someone to speak to amendment A8, can we just have unanimous consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Chair: Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to rise and introduce to you and through you some members from the Livingstone-Macleod riding. Their names are Nicole Monkman, Laci Pighin, Allen Topp, Derek Ully, Kyle Kohut, Eric Kinserdhal, Vern Habraken, Freeman Herron, and Wade Nelson. They're here as part of the group of industries against Bill 6. They're here to support the Wildrose along with their PC colleagues to fight for hard-working farmers and ranchers. They have travelled here from a long distance, and we'd like you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

Bill 4

An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act (continued)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on amendment A8.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to the amendment. I know that it might come as a bit of a surprise to the House, but I'll be speaking in support of the amendment. One of the significant challenges with this bill is the continual eroding of accountability of the government to the people of Alberta, and we've seen a number of things happen with respect to this eroding of the trust of Albertans in a number of pieces of legislation. I hope that later we'll have the chance to talk about some of the concerns around Bill 6 that speak specifically to that trust of the government by Albertans being eroded and this real lack of accountability. This real lack of transparency, a real lack of openness: that's exactly what we see in Bill 4 as well. We see the government taking all sorts of steps to be less accountable, to increase debt, to change legislation around the borrowing of operational spending, and this headlong rush to \$50 billion in debt.

So we have an opportunity here – and I've said this before in the House, but I think it bears repeating because it's so critically important to what we do here – and that is that we have to not only think about today, but we have to think of tomorrow. In every single piece of legislation this is exactly what we should be considering, which is not just the ramifications of today but the ramifications of tomorrow. We've seen this government with a lack of reporting around the quarterly updates, and the Finance minister rose just a few days ago in the House saying: well, Bill 4 changes the law; I don't have to provide a quarterly update.

9:00

Madam Chair, the challenge is that the law hasn't changed yet, so we're in a situation where Albertans and the Alberta public should have a much better idea of our fiscal picture. They were entitled to an update, and the law that's still in place today speaks specifically to a requirement to provide updates. These updates are critical to the openness and transparency of the government, and right now we don't have it.

I can tell you that in conversations that I've had with people in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, they're disappointed. They're disappointed in a number of things, in the lack of consultation around, I mean, obviously, Bill 6. Certainly, some school boards have raised concerns around the lack of consultation. It looks like over the weekend they might have tidied up some of that. They're also concerned with this question of trust and whether or not they can continue to trust this government, that's only seven or eight months old or whatever it is. We didn't see a quarterly update, and we ought to have seen a quarterly update.

One of the things that my hon. colleague from Strathmore-Brooks is intending to do – and I hope that all members of the House, including the Finance minister, will stand in their place and recognize that it is critically important that these quarterly updates take place. They're so important, Madam Chair, that my hon. colleague from Strathmore-Brooks has proposed an amendment that will do exactly that, that will ensure that what happened just a few days ago doesn't happen in the future, that the government won't be able to say: "Oh, don't blame us. We're just in the process of changing a law. Don't worry about the fact that we kind of might have broken the last law, that's in place right now. We're just going to move forward and do our very best to try and get this new law passed quickly, but disregard the old law that's been in place."

Say what you want – and I know that the government likes to blame the third party for all sorts of things – but one thing I can tell you that the third party did consistently and without skipping a beat, even when the numbers were disappointing, even when the numbers weren't perfect, even when the numbers told a story that wasn't great to tell, was that they stood in their place and provided a quarterly update. For that, we should all be thankful because it's

not the same transparency and openness that we're getting from this government.

It's my hope that my hon. colleague will expand upon some of the nuances of this amendment because it's a sound, solid amendment that provides a path forward, that will ensure that the government isn't tempted to break another law in the future.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. I won't be supporting this amendment. It's no surprise. I like not surprising people. The reason I won't be supporting this amendment is because of the late timing of the fall budget. I mean, it was unusual. I'll give you that. The budget that was proposed in March did not get passed. The new government had to create a budget, and we created that budget. We were hearing a lot from the other side: when are you going bring the budget? Well, it came out on October 27. It was put in front of this House. There was a lot of pomp and circumstance and ceremony, but the budget did get presented.

The budget was a month and three days before the proposed time for the quarterly updates, the second-quarter updates, the first six months, so because we provided a complete budget on the fiscal situation of this government going forward, we did not believe there needed to be an update before November 30. That's why we wrote this the way we did. We said, "notwithstanding subsection (1)(b)," which is with respect to a three-month update by August 31, a six-month update by November 30, and a nine-month update by February 28. It says, "Notwithstanding subsection (1)(b) [above], the responsible Minister is not required to report on the accuracy of the consolidated fiscal plan for the first 6 months of the 2015-16 fiscal year." Just this year, not every year. Going forward, there will be budget updates at three, six, and nine months: August 31, November 30, and February 28.

So the statements by the opposite side saying, you know, "If you give them this, they're going to take a mile; if you give them this, we need to shut it down," are not accurate. It's written in here that notwithstanding the above, we'll do it all the time for three, six, and nine months, but this year only, because we provided a full and complete budget, we are not doing a six-month update. It's logical. It makes a lot of sense. We're not asking for the moon. We're just saying that we gave you more information than you could possibly need. That's what we're going to do.

This amendment is not needed. It'll never be needed. It will never be our place in the future to come forward with another change to this with regard to not providing a three-, six-, or nine-month update.

Members of the government side: please refuse this amendment, the next one, the next one, and the next one that comes before you.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I listened carefully to the Finance minister's comments just now, and that's why I'm rubbing my forehead.

Dr. Starke: Your brain hurts?

Mr. McIver: Yeah. My hair is falling out fast enough.

Madam Chair, I'm sorry, but the explanations just don't hold water, unfortunately. I heard the hon. minister talk about how they provided a full budget. Even that little piece I have to take issue with. There is 4 and a half billion dollars in capital that actually isn't disclosed as to how it's going to be spent. I don't call that a complete budget. I don't call that a reasonable budget. I don't call that any kind of disclosure to the public, that they deserve. You

know, if you're going to take a billion dollars from the public, maybe you should kind of tell them where you intend to spend it, and if you take 4 and a half billion, maybe you should really tell them how you're going to spend it. Unfortunately, that's a gaping hole in the budget process that we've seen so far. So the explanation that it's a complete budget doesn't hold water.

I'm going to have to agree with my colleague from the Official Opposition on this one that breaking the law just once: really, Premier? Premier, I'm picking them over you this time. I'm telling you. You know why? Because they're right. I'll tell you why. It's because – you know what? – breaking the law just once isn't good enough. It's like saying, Madam Chair: "If I just do this one bank job, forget about the fact that I broke the law once. I won't break it again. I won't break it again."

Now, I appreciate, to be fair to the Minister of Finance, that I know you're not robbing a bank, okay? But the fact is that you're breaking the law, and the law of this province says that you need to report to the citizens. You haven't followed the law, and making an excuse that it's okay just this time really doesn't do it.

The problem is that I also heard the minister talk about how: well, we just did this budget; it took six months. Well, respectfully, Minister, it didn't need to take six months. We talked to you right after the election, in the first sitting, and we said: Albertans need to know.

9:10

In fact, the budget that you brought really was pretty unsatisfying for Albertans. They've been unsatisfied with a whole bunch of things in your budget. They're unsatisfied with the tax increases. They're unsatisfied with you not telling them where you're going to spend the money on the capital. They're surely unsatisfied with promising – talk about a great promise: we're going to put Alberta \$47 billion, \$50 billion in debt, and then we're going to start paying it back with \$1 billion five years from now.

I've said in this House before, standing here, and I'll say it again because it's that important. You're putting Alberta, based on the fact that Alberta spends – well, it's going to be more with your government but historically about \$47 billion. So you're going to put Alberta a whole year's wages in debt, and then five years from now you're going to start paying it back with a whole week's wages, \$1 billion. Albertans would lose their homes if they handled their mortgages that way. That's why I think they deserve to be reported to on a regular basis, particularly when you're promising such precarious financial policies, such risky and dangerous debt levels.

Again, I'll give the government credit. They say that Albertans love their services. The problem is that the way this government is going, they're putting those services at risk. Not this year, not next year, but four or five years from now then suddenly they become at risk. It's bad enough that you're trying to pay off a year's worth of government revenue with a week's worth of government surplus five years from now, but the fact is that when Alberta loses their triple-A credit rating, which is highly likely to happen on the path we're on, then even that bill is going to start multiplying faster. Everything is going to get more expensive for the government. It's going to be harder to buy things at the right price. Even borrowing money is going to cost more. Then this negative roller coaster that you've got the taxpayers on and you've got this province on is going to speed up in a very negative way.

I think the very least that the taxpayers of this great province should be able to depend upon is a quarterly report, that the law says is required. It's not much to ask for. It's the law. It's a reasonable request. In this particular case this is a very reasonable amendment and one that the government ought to stand up and say: "We'll

support it. We'll get the report out to you." It's late. It's against the law, but I'm sure that the citizens of Alberta will be somewhat understanding if the government at least makes an effort to obey their own laws, particularly on the quarterly report, you know, a quarterly report for a government that spends \$45 billion, \$50 billion a year, depending on what year it is. I think that if spending 12 and a half billion dollars isn't worth a quarterly report, then I really have to wonder how big the number has to be before citizens deserve to hear where their money went.

Madam Chair, I could go on longer, and I know there are a lot of people here that want me to, but I think I've to a large extent expressed what I think is right. I think I've to a large extent expressed what I think a lot of Albertans feel. With that, I will sit down, with the assurance that I will be supporting this amendment when the opportunity comes up.

The Chair: Any others? Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the leader of the third party for his remarks. I find myself in agreement, I think, with the vast majority of what he had to say. This is a breakthrough in our relationship. I believe we had a moment. We felt the moment here where there was a coming together of people in some kind of a common-sense sense of fiscal responsibility here.

The minister has made many excuses that just don't hold water. If I made excuses to my mom like that, I wouldn't get dinner.

Mr. McIver: That's why you're so skinny.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Watch it, Calgary-Hays.

You know, this amendment: its purpose is accountability. The quarterly update, the quarterly fiscal and economic update, was due on November 30. For those keeping time – and I'm sure many are watching the clock – November 30 has passed, and this bill is not law. I'm not a lawyer, but I think that if you've broken the law and if the law you intended to pass to make it legal to break that law has not passed, then you're in violation of the law. It seems a pretty simple point to me, Madam Chair. Perhaps it's not a simple point to the Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board, the Premier, and some members on the other side.

I've asked the minister in question period – and Oral Question Period can be a little more exciting than debates going to midnight on individual amendments on specific clauses of bills in Committee of the Whole – a simple question: did he break the law? Well, actually, I asked: why did he break the law? He by implication admitted that he'd broken the law, but the minister has not really fessed up to breaking the law. I'll repeat at the end, but I'm going to ask a question of the minister. Why did he break the law?

Now, he might think that it was reasonable. If he thought it was reasonable to break the law, he can make that argument, but first he should explain why he broke the law and admit if he did break the law. I think it's quite obvious to anyone who has a second-grade reading level here that the minister has in fact broken the law. The quarterly update, as I said, was due on the 30th of November 2015. It's too late for this clause to be abided by as the minister has already contravened the law, a point that I think has been established by most people who are thinking about the issue.

I think that it sets a very, very dangerous precedent – it's a dangerous, dangerous precedent – to have ministers of the Crown, ministers responsible for our government, especially a minister responsible for the budget, passing laws that retroactively say that their previous violations of the law are now legal. You know, in other amendments we've discussed the issue of retroactivity, of changing a law when the government is in violation of the law. It's dangerous. If you get a parking ticket, you can't go to city council

and ask them to pass a bylaw two weeks after you got the parking ticket and say, "Give me a pass on this one, Mayor Iveson" or "Do me a solid, Mayor Nenshi; can you pass a bylaw and give me a mulligan on that parking ticket?" Oh, how I wish they could. I wish they could. I've tried. Alas, you can't. But it seems that at this level of government you can. The government is asking for a \$50 billion mulligan.

9:20

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Fildebrandt: It's a \$50 billion mulligan.

You have to excuse me. My voice is a bit hoarse from our rigorous discussions into the evening last week.

The government is asking here for a \$50 billion mulligan from Albertans. Well, I think that's dangerous. Since the date for this has already passed, however, the section is moot, but it would compel the government, after the bill is passed, to abide by the law. They'll have still broken the law, they'll have still been in contravention of the law, but they'll be compelled to follow it afterwards. It allows me to come to question period day after day and ask the minister to finally present the quarterly update.

I remember that my first quarterly fiscal update for the province here was roughly around the end of August 2012. The Minister of Finance of the day was giving a quarterly update in the press theatre in the basement of this building. He went in and gave a report, a quarterly update. I called it a brochure. It didn't provide a balance sheet. It didn't provide a breakdown of revenues and expenditures. It was really just sort of: everything is fine, folks; move on. That got the minister in a lot of trouble. The Auditor General called him on it. He got in a lot of trouble. But at least the minister gave us a brochure. At least he tried. You know, he may have gotten an F, but at least he did his homework. He turned something in.

The Minister of Finance today didn't even do his homework. He didn't hand anything in. You know what happens to – well, maybe not in Alberta anymore under discovery learning education. Do you know what happens if you don't turn any work in, at least when we were kids? You got a fail. That's what happens when you don't turn your work in although I'm not sure if teachers are allowed to fail kids for not doing the work anymore. Perhaps that attitude has permeated its way into the cabinet.

So that part is moot because the law has already been broken. But it would compel the minister to finally give us something. Like a tolerant teacher, we'll allow him to hand in his homework late. There's no penalty for breaking the law, as we've already discussed. When governments break the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which became the Fiscal Management Act, which is now proposed to become the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, an Orwellian term if there ever was one, there is no penalty for it. There won't be a penalty for the minister if we pass this amendment, however much I think there should be. It will still require the minister to put one in.

If the minister is saying that the budget, which was likely, I think it's fair to say, written more than a day or two before it was tabled on the 27th of October 2015, was written more than a few days before then, all of the second-quarter information in it would be there. If it's all there, then why aren't we doing these quarterly updates only a month after the quarter ends instead of two? It speaks to how ready the data is. It speaks to: if the government has this data one month after it's done, then why not give it to us one month after it's done instead of two? It's a legitimate question: if the Minister of Finance and the government would be open to an amendment to move the dates up a month.

What does all this say about our deficit laws? We understand the circumstances, which the minister was speaking of, when the

budget was tabled, but the best way for us to make up for this slight oversight, the \$50 billion mulligan, is to simply produce some minimal second-quarter financial and economic update.

An Hon. Member: This is slight?

Mr. Fildebrandt: It's a slight oversight, a \$50 billion oversight.

The old law is quite lax, and it is at the discretion of the minister what form that takes. That was part of my problem with the Fiscal Management Act as it currently stands.

It would not take very much work for the government to do this. The Minister of Finance could ask a bureaucrat in his department to produce this report in probably about an hour's work. They have the data, surely. Surely, they know what their second-quarter results were in the economic update, in the fiscal update. The government has the data. It would take a low-level official about half an hour to put this all together, no more than an hour. They don't need to do a fancy press release. They don't need to hold a news conference. They just need to give us the data, give us a second-quarter financial update. It would make those of us on this side who care about the numbers oh-so happy.

Things have changed for the worse since the budget was tabled, and by the time the third-quarter update comes, we'll be about ready to talk about the next budget, however much taxpaying Albertans probably fear it. Things have changed quickly. The price of oil has continued to stay low. It is significantly below the government's projections, \$37 today. Did the government project that oil would be \$37 in its budget? Did the government project that oil would go down, not up? No.

9:30

It seems to me that the government is probably not on track to meet its second-quarter results, that its second-quarter results would not meet their targets. That is exactly why we need our second-quarter update. We need each quarterly update to ensure that the government stays on track. We have quarterly updates because in the 1980s and early 1990s governments would regularly budget one thing and tell Albertans in between budgets that everything was fine and everything was going to be just fine; trust the government. Well, we've been asked by this government to trust them quite a bit lately, haven't we? And I think they've shown quite clearly why they don't deserve that trust. Albertans don't trust them with the finances. Albertans don't trust them with farmers. Albertans don't trust them with the carbon tax.

Things have changed for the worse in our financial picture since the budget was tabled. That budget is now working off old data, data that was flawed to begin with: oil assumptions that were far above most market rates, GDP growth that predicted a superboom, a 15, 16 per cent increase in revenues in the fourth and fifth year of the budget without an iota of explanation about how they would do that.

Albertans deserve an update on their fiscal situation at times like these, in good times and in bad. Governments shouldn't provide quarterly updates only when the times are good and then get a good-news story in the *Herald* or the *Journal* on it. They should also provide it when times are bad. In fact, that's when we need it. That's why we have it, because governments in the 1980s would tell people it was fine and then finish the fiscal year having blown their budgets and coming under budget on revenues.

It was not a fiscally responsible thing to do, so Finance minister Jim Dinning put forward the strongest set of financial rules and budgetary framework in the country. He put forward a set of rules that served us well for nearly a decade and a half. Jim Dinning is a Conservative that we can look to for a good example of how we

should be conducting ourselves in our budgetary framework, about where we should be getting back to basics.

It is our duty as legislators and representatives of the people to be careful with people's money, to report regularly on how we're using that money. If you have investments in a portfolio and they don't give you your quarterly update as you've agreed to in your contract, you probably want to pull your money out. Well, some businesses are pulling their money out right now.

We'll have to continue this some other time.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thanks to my hon. colleague for presenting this amendment. I'm rising to say that I support this amendment. I'd like to ask the House to support it as well.

I want to compare the promise, the law to have this second quarterly update out, to one that we all had to deal with in May. The last government made a law that we would have fixed election dates every four years. Of course, it turned out that it wasn't quite a law or that the law wasn't written quite fairly or that it just wasn't quite the way it should have been. So because the Lieutenant Governor asked for one, it was okay to have an election.

Now we have a situation where the hon. Minister of Finance is saying: yeah, I know it was the law that I had to do the second update, but we did do a budget even though no one knew when that budget was coming. Many, many Albertans for certainty, clarity, and to get their finances in order would have liked to have had it sooner. "Okay, but we have a reason now where we sort of don't need it," even though many of the hon. members from the opposition have clearly explained how Bill 4 is not law yet, hence why we're here tonight and hence why we're debating these amendments and debating the law itself. To me, it comes squarely down on the Minister of Finance and the government's shoulders for trust. You know, the shock – Albertans told me after the budget that they absolutely couldn't believe that our great province, with high revenues and tons of entrepreneurs and hard-working, educated people, is actually borrowing to pay for the groceries now. An operational deficit: the shock that that has reached.

The other thing equally as much is when my neighbours, friends, community members in Cypress-Medicine Hat and all around Alberta, Madam Chair, look at the job losses, 10 to 30 per cent reductions. The shock and awe of Albertans who told me that this government appeared to look for no efficiencies. "Yeah, we absolutely don't want to cut front-line workers and front-line services either, but, my goodness, we want more value for our hard-earned tax dollars," many, many Albertans have told me. Then to be \$47 billion in debt just three years from now . . .

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Barnes: Forty seven billion dollars in debt.

And that is based on oil being at \$56 or \$53 this year and around \$62 next year, I believe, when today it closed at \$37. My goodness. Three years from now we'll be running an election, if the fixed election date law is valid, with you guys some side of \$60 billion in debt. If that doesn't shake the trust of Albertans to the core, I don't know what will.

So what do you do to earn trust? What do you do to make it so more than 50 per cent of Albertans show up at the polls? What do you do to make it so when we go to coffee shops we don't hear that Albertans aren't able to be involved in their system in their province? You do it by being as open and as transparent as you can, and that means living up to fixed election dates even though there might be a little technicality in the law. That means filing the second

quarterly report. Okay; maybe you don't have to. Maybe it's a loophole, but, darn it, there are many, many Albertans that rely on that information, Madam Chair, so they can make capital investment decisions, so they can build jobs, so they can plan their family, plan whether they think they can afford to send their daughter or son to university, and that information was not here.

You know, I'm pleased to see so many Albertans up in the gallery tonight. Government, I think that's a trust issue, too. Albertans everywhere don't trust writing a blank cheque, don't trust a law that's vague, without information. Again, many, many Albertans have given their hard-working lives, many hard-earned tax dollars, fourth, fifth, and sixth generations working to make our province strong. At the very least they deserve an update as to their financial position. They deserve an update to know where they're going to be, going forward, when it comes to being able to afford the tax-and-spend government that we've had since May 5. They need to know that they can afford, you know, that they can live up to their business and their family and their community commitments and their not-for-profit donations rather than a government that gets bigger and bigger and seems to hide where they stand.

In closing, I will support the amendment for openness and transparency, and as often as I get the chance in this House, I will stand up and I will speak on behalf of as much openness, as much information, and as much transparency as possible.

Thank you.

9:40

The Chair: Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am very happy to rise and support the amendment tabled by the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. It's becoming painfully obvious that we have a minister in this House that has already contravened the law, and now he's trying to retroactively make a special exemption, which is a truly enviable position to be in. I'm reminded that the chairman of the Alberta Securities Commission was late reporting one time, and the Ontario Securities Commission fined him a thousand-dollar penalty for being late in issuing a report. That particular report was only to report that he'd made a \$171 profit on a deal. So for a \$171 profit and a late report the Ontario Securities Commission, which had rules about reporting on time, fined Chairman Rice of the Alberta Securities Commission \$1,000.

Of course, had the chairman been of the same mindset as our Minister of Finance, he would have gone back and said: well, I would like to make an amendment to this existing regulation, and let's make it retroactive so I don't have to pay the thousand-dollar fine for filing this report so late. But, no. He paid his thousand dollars. He fessed up, and he paid his thousand dollars.

Of course, he wasn't the only person that's had that kind of an issue. I'm sure that everyone in this room remembers the collapse of the mortgage-financing industry in the United States and that the rating agency Standard & Poor's changed their rating metrics following that collapse after they did an investigation into why it was that their rating metric wasn't downgrading some of these companies as fast as they should have been downgraded. Well, Standard & Poor's changed their rating metrics to include, quote, such things as timely filing of required reports.

So my point in bringing that to the attention of this House is that if the Minister of Finance believes that the bond-rating agencies are not watching the timely reporting of quarterly reports, he is sadly mistaken. You know, we have already heard that we are on a watch by these rating companies. They are watching Alberta. If this was a corporation traded on the stock exchange, the bond-rating agencies,

at least Standard & Poor's, would say: uh-oh, a red flag; they missed filing a quarterly report.

It's not going to go unnoticed. It is an indication, according to their own words, of competence in management. Competence in management. So the corollary of that would be true, that if you're a company that can't manage to get your reports out on time, that's an indication of incompetence, and it reflects on your ultimate rating from that rating agency. That's how important this is. This is not a minor, little thing. It's serious. It is very serious.

Now, something else was an interesting study that was conducted by Glass Lewis, who is an organization that studies market trends when companies do bad things. In one of these reports they studied what happens to publicly traded corporations when they file late. I'll quote this to you:

As for late filers? Companies that let their deadline pass "without filing a management report or auditor opinion on the effectiveness of the internal controls," the study found, saw their share prices drop.

In other words, the stock market itself punishes those companies that file late.

Glass Lewis actually quantified just what the impact was from the market when publicly traded corporations failed to do their reporting on time. They found that the share price dropped an average of 2.13 per cent after just one day late; after seven days, 2.89 per cent; after 30 days, 3.81 per cent; and two months late, a 7 per cent decline in that company's share price. That is a significant amount of money. We're talking, in some cases, billions of dollars with some of the larger corporations. What we see in the marketplace, what we see in the Alberta Securities Commission, the Ontario Securities Commission, the United States securities commission is that there are consequences, adverse consequences for failing to provide necessary quarterly reports. It's not just a little thing.

Though our minister is required by section 11 of the Fiscal Management Act to make public the actual results of the fiscal plan for the first six months of the fiscal year on or before November 30, this Finance minister failed to do so. In order to get around the law, the minister has now included in this act an exemption excusing them from bringing this information in in time for the law. This was in spite of a long-delayed budgeting process, which, I would have to conclude, took so long for no other reason than to help their federal partners avoid suffering any consequences from this Alberta budget.

Then for the minister to stand in this House and say, "Well, I'm sorry it took so long to get this budget out, and then we had to get this report out, too," frankly, just doesn't hold water. It doesn't hold water at all. This government, in my opinion and in the opinion of many other people, purposely delayed bringing this budget out on time, in a timely manner, for no other reason than to skirt the federal election. Now, to blame that as the reason why this report was not filed on time according to our law is simply unacceptable.

Furthermore, the minister told this House that the budget meant that there was no need for a November 30 update. I want to provide the minister a little bit of information, that a budget is a projection of the plans for the future. It's a projection. The quarterly report is the actual. To suggest that having a budget therefore negates the need for a quarterly report indicates a very serious misunderstanding of what a budget is and what the quarterly report provides us.

The minister is claiming that this fulsome budget somehow impedes the reporting of what's been spent and received or that the budget is somehow good enough and that we don't need a quarterly report. It's quite nonsensical, actually, and it causes me to wonder. Is the minister trying to hide something? The reason that it causes

me that suspicion is because the very law requiring quarterly updates was brought into this provincial body of law to hold governments accountable for their handling of Albertans' money and to have a quarterly report that all Albertans could look at and say: oh, look at what's actually happening. The budget is one thing; quarterly reports are another.

This action, actually, is an affront to Albertans, and it shows a disrespect for transparency and accountability, a direct contradiction of the name of this thing. With the inclusion of permission for the minister to skip this year's quarterly update, we are now building a new precedent. We've seen this government, you know, take away accountability laws before. We now have a change in the borrowing cap. We now have this government getting rid of a law that would stop the government from borrowing for operations. We see this government time and again actually becoming less transparent and less accountable, and that's not what you promised Albertans during the election.

9:50

Now, regardless of external pressures it was really unacceptable for the Finance minister to not table the actual results of the fiscal plan for the first six months of the fiscal year in time for this requirement. At the very least he could have been up front about the reasons why he was not following this law. He knew about this law from the beginning. His staff knew about this law. They've had it in place for a very long time. It's not that it came as a surprise to him, and the fact that he made no mention of the issue and tried to sneak the November date past us all, well, without mentioning it shows that he was not proud of what he was doing. Tabling these figures would have been transparent. Tabling these figures would have demonstrated accountability. Tabling these figures would have demonstrated competence. You owed this information to Albertans. It's their money.

I'll remind this government that disrespect for our laws and our people took down a governing party before you, and this disrespect will do the same to any government. This NDP government already asked Albertans for a blank cheque this summer. To then turn around and break the laws designed to prevent irresponsible politicians from spending beyond our province's means without accountability is disrespectful and, furthermore, shows quite a callous lack of concern for Alberta's taxpayers of today and those even of future generations. The NDP has already committed themselves to a continuation of the funny-money accounting of the previous government. To break this province's fiscal law in addition to these practices is, frankly, a step too far. This is not the kind of precedent that we want to see set in this government's processes.

However, let's grant the minister his main line of defence, that because of the timing of the budget, it is somehow acceptable to skip the update. That issue is now moot. November 30 has come and gone, and the damage, however extensive it is, has been done, and there's no need to clutter up this bill permanently with a reminder of this minister's failure to follow the law. The government put it here with the intention of passing it before the critical date of November 30 but failed. I ask the government to seriously consider whether they really want this testament to their ineptitude sitting on the books, enshrined in law. Laws are supposed to be permanent documents, not filled with little one-offs that excuse the transgressions of the minister of the day.

A government using its powers to make their misdeeds retroactively legal is insulting to the province's fiscal laws, Alberta's taxpayers, and it is also a mockery of democracy. Albertans deserve to see these laws, that promote accountability, respected and upheld. This is the wrong course to be taking our province on. Today it is the actual results of the fiscal plan; there is

no telling what law this government will break tomorrow only to retroactively change it. There should be no wondering why Albertans have already lost faith in a government that was elected on a mandate to change the old tide of corruption. Voting down this amendment today is a slap in the face of Albertans that elected you. The voters in our province have been disrespected for too long. Good governance is transparent governance. Good governance is self-disciplined, holding itself accountable to the law. This is about transparency. This budget and our time today should be used toward increasing transparency. Is that not what we all heard on May 5?

Albertans deserve an update on our fiscal situation, especially in these troubled and rapidly changing times. Given the grave state of our economy at the hands of this socialist agenda Albertan mothers and fathers and young adults are being forced to make many very serious and painful decisions, that are going to affect their future. They need to be able to assess the state of the economy and hedge appropriately. So I implore all of you to rectify the Finance minister's very grave mistake by making it clear that there are no circumstances under which it may be permitted to happen again and not to let him compound his failing by enshrining this little episode eternally in law. Let's just delete that clause, that this amendment attempts to do, since as of December 1 it is meaningless.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any others wishing to speak to amendment A8?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A8 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:56 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Fildebrandt	Nixon
Barnes	Fraser	Panda
Clark	Hunter	Pitt
Cooper	Loewen	Starke
Cyr	MacIntyre	Yao
Ellis	McIver	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	Miranda
Babcock	Hinkley	Nielsen
Bilous	Horne	Notley
Carlier	Kazim	Piquette
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Ceci	Larivee	Schmidt
Connolly	Littlewood	Schreiner
Coolahan	Loyola	Shepherd
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Sigurdson
Dach	Malkinson	Sucha
Dang	Mason	Swann
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Feehan	Miller	Westhead
Ganley		

Totals: For – 17 Against – 40

[Motion on amendment A8 lost]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. I stand today to speak to Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. This bill is about enabling the NDP government to implement higher taxes and more debt because this government refuses to reduce its bloated spending practices. No government has ever borrowed its way to a balanced budget, and certainly no government will ever be able to borrow its way to a surplus budget. We need to somehow curtail the money this NDP government is throwing around in this province. Let's get it straight that deficit budgets lead to higher debt, which eventually leads to an unstable economy, something we're already seeing because of this government's and the previous government's spending practices. The costs associated with paying off this debt take away money that could be used to build schools, bridges, hospitals, roads, and the list goes on, Madam Chair. In fact, if we continue down this road for too long, it could have an impact on how many people will be feasibly employed in the future. The unionized workers that the NDP are trying to protect right now will be the same people they will not be able to afford to keep because there won't be enough money.

The members on the other side of the aisle have tried to make Albertans fearful of Wildrose fiscal policies. [interjections] Yes, you tried to do that in the Calgary-Foothills by-election, and we saw that. But the damage that will be caused by this government's fiscal policies is something to be really afraid of, and Albertans are afraid in sitting there listening to this.

If we calculate the amount of money we'll be losing every year that could be used on infrastructure projects like the Calgary cancer hospital, the amount we will lose is eight hospitals every year that we pay \$2 billion in interest alone.

Mr. Nixon: How much?

Mr. Panda: Two billion dollars in interest alone.

It's not a good plan to increase the debt limit. The unavoidable effect is that we are throwing away money through interest payments, \$2 billion in interest payments. That's a ton of interest, Madam Chair, an amount of money so large that most of us have to really think about what that number means. In this bill we have seen the government raise the debt ceiling at the stroke of a pen. They have shown that it is really not that hard to do. There are not any real consequences for doing it since they turned down some of our amendments that would have instituted real consequences.

Let's break this bill down and be clear about showing what will eventually happen. This bill is about enabling the government to inflict higher taxes on Albertans and to run operational deficits, which for decades have been illegal. You say that you want both businesses and those who are well off to pay just a little bit more, but you have a 266 per cent tax increase on railroad fuel. Is that what you call just a little bit? This is another disappointing move. This government seems to feel that pipelines for getting our oil to market are a low priority, and they're also willing to increase the cost of shipping that product by rail. Businesses may look at other jurisdictions to get their fuel at a lower cost and look for all sorts of other possibilities to reduce their costs. We must create a business-friendly environment by keeping the cost of doing business as low as possible. It just makes sense.

10:20

The analogy is almost the same as giving someone irresponsible a credit card and them having the idea that the money borrowed is free money. Their thought, just like this government, is that as long as you max out the credit card while prices are low, you will get more for your money. This government needs to take the time to go

and talk to a financial adviser to find out if their concepts are accurate and how long they would be able to keep their house if they ran their personal finances the same way. The tax on cigarettes went up \$5 a carton, and on loose tobacco products it went up to 3.75 cents per gram, a product I neither consume or I advocate for, but it will have, I believe, unintended consequences.

In my constituency office in Calgary-Foothills, if I exceed the budget allotted to my office, I personally have to pay back every penny. Why is the government not held to the same principles? I wish there were some sort of penalty they would legislate every time the government exceeded a certain percentage instead of legislating something that in the past had been considered illegal.

An Hon. Member: In three and a half years.

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Help is on its way.

We need consequences in place when they exceed the budget. What protections do we have in place for future generations? Maybe we should legislate that. Unfortunately, the only possible consequence of reckless spending and irresponsible tax increases will be to drive money and jobs right out of Alberta. They will only be able to borrow so much money, and the next generation will be the one responsible to pay it back. I'm afraid that young families, such as of the Member for Calgary-Shaw, will be burdened to pay this debt. I believe that this government's view is short sighted, and it needs to be stopped. You need to reconsider what these changes will do to this province.

Unfortunately, Madam Chair, this bill is going to give this NDP government full permission to spend Alberta into further debt. For this reason I'll be voting against Bill 4. I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to the bill? Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's that time again, when we're going to try and make the bill a little less bad than it is in its current form. I will introduce this amendment to be distributed.

Thank you.

The Chair: This amendment will be A9.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, be amended in schedule 2 in section 1 by striking out subsection (27).

Now, I always feel a little strange reading the title of the bill. Any bill that begins with the title "An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures" has probably lost my support right there. I try not to judge a book by its cover or even a piece of legislation by its cover, but in this case I feel pretty safe doing so.

This amendment seeks to repeal the government's inexplicable move to increase the insurance tax rate. It's a nonsensical idea. Increasing a tax on something that is mandatory for Albertans is gouging. If the NDP across like to rail against the idea of a conspiracy, of a cartel working together to price-fix or drive up the cost of a particular product that people need, well, they call that gouging. In this case the government is increasing the cost of something that their own laws make mandatory for Albertans, not just necessary but mandatory, and they're increasing taxes on it. Cigarettes, liquor, carbon: the government can make at least a

reasonable argument that they want less of these things, but do they want less insurance? [interjection] Apparently, it's bad.

I get the idea of taxing a social ill – they call them sin taxes – that gasoline is bad so we should tax gasoline, that cigarettes are bad, quite obviously, so we should tax cigarettes.

Mr. Mason: Opposition members.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Taxing opposition members, taxing our time, taxing the government's patience. If we taxed the government's patience, I think we could have gotten out of the deficit by tonight. [interjection] It is perhaps the only tax I will support.

Taxing cigarettes, taxing alcohol, taxing gasoline: I get that these are sin taxes. These are things that government wants to discourage. They're called sin taxes because we're taxing sins. But is insurance not a good thing? Does this, then, constitute a virtue tax? Shouldn't government be encouraging insurance, not discouraging it? Insurance is a social good. It benefits everyone. Why should people be punished for being responsible? Why should they be punished for insuring their home? Why should people be punished for insuring their car or if they've got a boat? Why should they be taxed for life insurance? Why would we want to make it more difficult or more expensive for people to protect their families with life insurance than it already is? Do we not want more of that, not less of it? For some reason this lumps insurance tax in with cigarettes. Well, it is strange that we've gotten to the point where we are increasing taxes on both cigarettes and life insurance at the same time.

With over 60 taxes and fees raised on Albertans, surely we can rescind at least one of them. Madam Premier, do taxpayers a solid. Give them one. With a massive increase in income tax, a 50 per cent increase at the top marginal rate; a 20 per cent increase in corporate income taxes on our businesses; a \$3 billion carbon tax on everything; a myriad of small taxes and fees on gasoline, cigarettes, alcohol, and on countless products and activities that Albertans engage in – 60 taxes and fees are being raised – can you do one for them? Can you do them a solid?

Madam Chair, I think this is a pretty reasonable amendment. It will not cost the government a significant sum of money, but it would be perhaps a spiritual breakthrough for the government. I mean, we've had a few moments in this place where we can all get along, where we can come to consensus on a few issues.

10:30

Now, we're not likely to vote together on many things tonight. But insurance tax – I saw an interesting eyebrow raised over there, so that probably is a good idea. Well, this is unlikely to have any significant impact on the budget. It's not a huge tax increase. The huge tax increases are elsewhere, in personal income taxes, business income taxes, and carbon taxes. This is not going to significantly affect the budget, but as I said, it would signify a spiritual breakthrough that they could actually cut a tax or rescind a tax, especially one that is on something that we should be encouraging, insurance. We should want more insurance, not less.

Mr. McIver: WCB.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I suppose, while we're on the topic, the government is extending mandatory workplace insurance and WCB. They are trying to make it mandatory on swaths of people, many of which do not want it. But they're going to tax it. Interesting question: would WCB be taxed under this? A new definition of government recycling.

I suppose we can give the minister a few moments to ponder this one and think about it. I think he already said, roughly half an hour

ago, that there won't be anything good coming even though he hasn't seen it. But I ask him to really think on this one. This one makes sense. It makes sense for all Albertans. Let's try to get along on this one and pass amendment A9.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any others wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you. I would certainly like to speak to this amendment. Man, there are so many similarities between the PC budget and this budget: taxes, taxes, taxes. This one has, you know, unfortunately, quite a few extra taxes. Cigarettes and liquor: I think it's sort of a general understanding; it's the first tax that goes up. It's the one that nobody argues too much about. It's unfortunate, but it happens, and we expect that.

Carbon tax is shocking because people aren't going to drive less. They're really not. They're going to choose to not do other things like eat out, go to the movies, you know, spend some quality time at Calaway park with their children. It's just absolutely unbelievable. There are a lot of things that are going to change for a lot of people.

But insurance? The people of Airdrie, specifically, are not going to take well to this one. We just had an epic hailstorm come through, and everybody's rates just went up. Now they're going up again. I'm not quite sure when this stops. Insurance is something that is supposed to protect the people, protect their property, and it's hurting. It's absolutely hurting. This is surely one amendment that we can all agree on that would make just a small, little pea in the pot. It would make a big difference for so many families, so many children. I'm really hoping we can work together on this one.

The hail in Airdrie was just absolutely devastating. What would we have done without insurance? I mean, surely there are some. Still, we're paying our deposits on the insurance, and then the rates go up, and now thanks to this government they're going to go up one more time. When does it end? We can't even imagine what's going to happen in the springtime. This is just absolutely shocking.

You know, fortunately for those in this room, you just got fancy pay raises. You're probably not used to spending that kind of money yet, which is a great thing for your family budget because you might be able to make ends meet. But there are a lot of people out there that are suffering, and this government doesn't seem to care.

I'm really not quite sure why this government is choosing to punish people. They're punishing Albertans. You're borrowing money and making strange decisions on how to spend it, and that's only the money we know about. Please. I plead with you. On behalf of the people of Airdrie and Albertans: please. When there are 60 other taxes and fees that you've implemented, we, please, ask for this one little take for the people of Alberta. We will surely appreciate it.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am rising to speak against this particular amendment. I know it shocks the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. We've heard a lot of talk in the debate for Bill 4 and for the various amendments that it is important to take into consideration the people of our particular ridings. We have often heard many of the members opposite talk about how they need hospitals in their ridings: hospitals in Airdrie, hospitals in Wainwright, Lac La Biche, Fort McMurray. We've also heard from other members opposite that their particular ridings have a need for more staff at various facilities that are publicly funded.

Cortes-Vargas: Maintenance.

Mr. Malkinson: Maintenance as well.

All of those things, of course, are good. You know, good on the various members for advocating for those needs in their particular ridings.

Also, the members opposite have talked at length throughout this debate about the importance of having zero debt, the importance of having zero structural debt even in times of a downturn.

Now, unfortunately, for me, that math doesn't add up. You know, my question would be that if you are advocating for things, for new hospitals in various areas, that, of course, would cost large sums of money, I would say billions of dollars. If you want to cut back by not going into debt some say for capital spending, some say for structural deficit when we have a massive downturn, that we have right now – the price of oil, for example, not that long ago was over a hundred dollars a barrel. Now it is under \$40 a barrel. That leaves a massive hole in our budget for the province because of the downturn.

Now, if we want to have those hospitals and extra services and we don't want to be in debt in the time of a downturn, if we do not want to act as a shock absorber, which I believe Albertans have wanted us to do, then I would ask the members opposite: what do they want to give up? You cannot have new hospitals and new services and not go into debt in a downturn. I just don't see how that would work.

Now, this particular amendment, if passed, would take away a bit of stable revenue – granted, a small amount but a bit of stable revenue – to help in a time of a downturn, a downturn that is definitely affected by the price of oil. It would also keep our premiums and tax rates comparable to other provinces. This rate was also mentioned in the March version of the budget.

I think it is a reasonable amount in order to have us act as a shock absorber, to provide the services that Albertans want, and of course I'd like to point out to the members that we recently passed a budget that has a path to balance.

10:40

Dr. Turner: A very clear path.

Mr. Malkinson: I highlight that the member beside me said: a very clear path to balance.

For those reasons, I will not be voting in favour of this amendment. Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is an interesting amendment. It talks about taking away the increased taxes on insurance. I'm a little surprised, actually, that this particular government would put this in place, because you know whom it's going to hurt worse than anybody: the lowest income people in Alberta, the people that have the hardest time paying the monthly bills. Of course, these are exactly the people that this current government says that they care about, and they're the ones that are going to pay the price for this new tax. Now, people of high income can afford it, I suppose, although every time they afford it, they will spend less money in the economy, and a lot of that money will be spent in places that provide jobs for lower income Albertans.

But the real place that I think it'll hurt lower income Albertans is that there are going to be some of them that will probably have to choose not to continue their insurance. Nobody likes it when disasters happen: fires, floods, all those types of things. In terms of fires, we have seen instances where multifamily units have burned down, whether it's a high-rise or townhouses or whatever it is.

Sometimes it's homes close to each other, where the fire jumps from one to the other. You know, the saddest thing when that happens is that some of the homeowners or apartment owners or renters don't have insurance.

It's not good for anybody, and I'm not trying to make light of this, but the fact is that I always feel bad when I hear, you know, that in a building of six, eight, 10 units, whatever it is, there are four or five them that didn't have renters' insurance or homeowners' insurance. What happens, then, is that they lose some of the biggest investments that they have in their life, some of the possessions that they have. Now, whether it's a little or a lot, the fact is that it's the family's possessions. This is a tax that is going to make it particularly hard, particularly for those low-income Albertans, to make that decision to pay that much more for the insurance.

It's particularly going to make it hard for Albertans that have lost their jobs due to this government's policies. You might say: what Albertans have lost their jobs, you know, due to this government's policies? Well, it could be one of thousands of people in the coal industry. We know they're under attack. It could be one of tens of thousands of people in the energy industry. We know they're under attack. Soon it could be farmers and ranchers. We're really sure they're under attack. It could be somebody that has a small business that's incorporated, and they're paying more taxes. It could be somebody of middle income that has a business with the additional income taxes put on. Every time you do this, you make somebody make a different decision about what they can afford and what they can't afford. Of course, what you don't hear about when something happens, when a multifamily unit burns down – I'm sorry to say, but it's typically low-income Albertans that are the ones that don't have insurance on their possessions or on their home. So this is this government putting more pressure on the exact people that they're purporting to want to help.

So many times through the taxes in Bill 4 it is the case. Unfortunately, this doesn't seem to be the end of it. You know, there are more things coming up. I mean, we haven't seen all the details yet, but the government has even talked about, with the carbon tax, that they want to give money back to 60 per cent of Albertans. It's just another case where, again, all Albertans will pay more for their energy. With low-income Albertans, that are going to pay more for their energy – and the government is going to artificially inflate the price with the carbon tax. Then they're going to rebate low-income Albertans back to where it was in the first place and then say: we want you to thank us now by voting for us next time because we artificially inflated your energy price, and then we rebated it back almost to where it would be anyway, and then we sent you a cheque for what we hope will be the difference. It will probably be light of the difference, but hopefully that will buy enough gratitude to get their vote next time.

It's really indicative of a pattern here from a government that actually doesn't seem to realize yet – I'm not sure if they ever will – that low taxes are actually better for Albertans. Low taxes are actually better for low-income Albertans. It provides more opportunities, more jobs, more places. It actually provides more incentive for those people with money to invest, who want to invest in Alberta, to create those jobs.

This insurance tax is just one more way in which – all Albertans will pay it, at least the ones that can afford insurance in the first place. But the ones that will find it the most tough to pay are the ones that are closest to the line in making ends meet at the end of the month. You know what? Every family will make a different decision. Some will have less food. Some will have less entertainment. Some will, you know, maybe drive an older car, have older appliances. Some, unfortunately, Madam Chair, will decide

that they can't afford the insurance anymore, and that, of course, just puts them at greater risk.

There is the stress of worrying about it day after day as opposed to people that believe they have their affairs in order, that are properly insured and looked after. All of those, of course, worry about fire and other things happening, too, but they'll have the peace of mind of knowing that they have themselves protected. This, of course, will take some Albertans that can least afford it – some of those will likely have to make the decision to forgo their insurance and then lose that peace of mind. Even if they don't have a fire, it's hard on them. It adds stress. It probably takes time off their life because stress will do that. This is just one more pressure that this government is putting on Alberta families, the ones that can afford it the least, adding stress to them. That's why I'm going to support the amendment, because I think the less that you put Albertans under financial pressure artificially, the more opportunities there are and the better their lives will be.

This, unfortunately, is an example of going in the exact opposite direction from what will most benefit Albertans. I'm hoping that the government members will have an appreciation for how hard it is for a lot of Albertans to make ends meet, particularly those that have a fine line between what they bring in in their family income and what has to go out to pay for insurance and rent and food and utilities and car payments and repairs and all those things.

Please don't add more pressure onto them. Please support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess some of the concerns I have with Bill 4 but speaking specifically to this amendment are that, you know, when the government has an \$8 billion hole that they need to fill, obviously it makes a lot of sense for them to go after a captive tax audience. What's sad about this is going after insurance. Many of the insurances are mandatory. It is the law that they have to have this insurance. With vehicles you have to have a minimum of PL/PD. Members will have to have at least a minimum insurance, and this tax will affect them.

People who are on fixed incomes: I'm concerned about them. It may not be a lot, but everything that this government has brought forward like the carbon tax, which is just another way of saying PST, will add to the costs for fixed-income people, to the point where they have no ability to make up the extra money that it's going to cost them.

10:50

I understand the idea about sin taxes, as has been said before, even though I think that again is a cheap shot for people who have addictions and are struggling. They know that it's an easy way to be able to get more money. In fact, a brother of mine who smokes like a chimney always says: "You know what? The first thing the government will do is that it will go after me because they know I have a hard time. I can't quit." I think it's a cheap shot. But this is the worst kind of shot, Madam Chair, because people who are on fixed incomes don't have the ability to go shop anywhere else. They can't say: "You know what? That insurance company hasn't earned my business, so I'll go to a different insurer." They can't do that because this tax will go to every insurance company out there, and they will have to pay this.

All of these costs that this government has added onto senior citizens, fixed-income earners, will add up to the point where they will feel the burden, and they will make them pay in the next election. They say that hindsight is 20/20 vision. Well, I don't need

to go three and a half years down the road to tell you that seniors have excellent memories. They have excellent memories, and they will remember this day when they had the opportunity to say: we're not going to tax this group; we're not going to add this tax to people who are fixed-income earners. Yet the idea that we've heard from some of the members opposite is that the government needs this money. If they don't get it, then they can't do the things that they need to do.

Albertans need the money in their own pockets. I'm going to tell you something, and it's very important to realize this. There are three types of purchases: first-party purchases, second-party purchases, and third-party purchases. A first-party purchaser is a person who says: I know exactly what I want to buy, and I know how much money I have to buy it. That person is using their own money, and they're going to consume that product. That's a first-party purchase.

Second-party purchasers may buy something for someone else, but they're going to use their own money. They're concerned about their money, but maybe they're not going to consume it themselves.

A third-party purchase is where someone buys something with someone else's money, and they're not going to personally consume it. All government purchases are third-party purchases. I think the problem is that this government doesn't seem to understand that all government purchases are third-party purchases. This is the reason why as the Official Opposition we need to be vigilant with where the money is going. We need to make sure that the tax dollars are spent effectively and efficiently. We need to make sure that they only take the bare minimum because the people who have the money, the people who have the means, have the ability to be able to make first-party purchases, and it's the most efficient and effective way to be able to spend money. That's why the most successful countries in the world are the ones that keep the most money in individuals' pockets because they know how to spend it and they spend it the best.

This amendment is trying to make a bad budget a little better. It's a small concession to make. This is why I will be voting for it, Madam Chair, and I hope that all members will take this seriously. This isn't just a little bit of money. This is a lot of money for someone who's on a fixed-income.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment?

If not, we will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A9 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:55 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Ellis	McIver
Barnes	Fildebrandt	Panda
Clark	Hunter	Pitt
Cooper	Loewen	Starke
Cyr	MacIntyre	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	Miranda
Babcock	Hinkley	Nielsen
Bilous	Horne	Notley
Carlier	Kazim	Piquette

Carson	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Ceci	Larivee	Schmidt
Connolly	Littlewood	Schreiner
Coolahan	Loyola	Shepherd
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Sigurdson
Dach	Malkinson	Sucha
Dang	Mason	Swann
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Feehan	Miller	Westhead
Ganley		
Totals:	For – 14	Against – 40

[Motion on amendment A9 lost]

11:00

The Chair: We're back on the bill. Any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to the bill?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, Madam Chair, I did have two more amendments, but I'm going to make the government a deal. This is your last chance to do something good. This is your last chance to repeal at least one tax, to have a spiritual awakening, as it were. I assure Madam Premier that she has missed many opportunities to make this a better bill tonight, but this is a limited-time offer. As people are watching late night TV right now, if you dial the number below your screen, you can get a tax cut.

I'll distribute this now.

The Chair: This will be amendment A10.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is a limited-time offer, if members vote now, to finally vote for less taxes somewhere, that An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act be amended in schedule 2 in section 3(7)(a) by striking out subclauses (iii) and (iv). In short, this is to undo the proposed railroad tax hike, the cost on locomotive fuel. This poses huge problems for market access in Alberta. It hurts the grain growers in my constituency, the barley and canola growers, the beef producers, and oil producers.

I urge all members of the House to support it.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A10? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. It's my pleasure to speak to this amendment on the railroad fuel tax. Madam Chair, this is probably one of the most harmful elements out of the current bill, largely because it attacks essentially all of Alberta's core industries. Albertans, as we know, are very industrious people. They produce more of almost everything than they can consume themselves. Albertans produce more forest products than Albertans can use. They produce more agricultural products than Albertans can consume. Albertans produce more energy products than Albertans can use. And how do we move these products? Well, one of the main ways is on the railway.

This is essentially an attack on the forestry industry, the coal industry, the agriculture industry. The minister in charge should actually be real nervous about this particular tax. You should be voting for this because this would be one of the things you could do to indicate that you're actually in support of the industry that you get paid to support.

On top of that, this is something that will make virtually every consumer product in Alberta more expensive because anything that comes from anywhere else, or at least a good part of those things,

travels at least some part of the way on a train. When they come from overseas and land in a port in Vancouver or Montreal, very, very often they get closer to here on a railroad. Really, again, this is a tax that is going to hurt the low-income Albertans by making the consumer goods that they in many cases can barely afford more expensive.

It will make the coal industry less competitive by making it more expensive to ship their products. I know that there are probably people on the government side that don't like the coal industry, but the fact is that some of that coal goes over to Japan to make the Priuses that you're so fond of. In fact, some of it actually produces your electricity. I appreciate that the government doesn't like that, but the fact is that the coal part of the load is the most reliable, cost-effective part of the electricity supply. It is. I appreciate that some of the older plants aren't as efficient as the newer ones are, but the newest coal plants in particular are reputed to be about as clean as burning natural gases. Why would we make that industry less competitive?

Why would we make the forest industry less competitive? It's a very competitive business. Lord knows, our province and our country have been in trade wars with the U.S. over the lumber trade for years, one appeal to the World Trade Organization after another after another after another. Canada won the vast majority of those if not all of them. So you know that it's a competitive business.

What's our government's answer to low energy prices and high unemployment? To make the industries that we have left even less competitive by making it more expensive to get their goods to market. The same goes for the energy products. Now, I appreciate that we've heard the Premier and some of the ministers say that they're in favour of pipelines – maybe they are; maybe they aren't – but I don't think that the evidence has really supported that to date. Certainly, we've heard the Premier say that she's in support of a pipeline to the east but not to the west coast, which is the closer one, not south to the U.S., not to the north. In the absence of pipelines, how is most of the energy that leaves Alberta getting shipped? On rail. So what's the answer to saving jobs? To make the energy that we're producing less competitive by making it more expensive to get to market. Well, Albertans actually know better.

I appreciate that the government has big spending plans and that they're trying to raise money. But at the end of the day, I think that it's going to be obvious that if you make Alberta less competitive, there will be fewer goods leaving, fewer jobs, fewer people with those jobs paying taxes, fewer corporations providing those jobs paying taxes, or they will be there and they'll be less profitable, which means there are fewer taxes to pay. Any way you look at it, this is a tax that directly negatively affects the core economy of our province. Why would you support that?

Certainly, the agriculture minister should be voting for this amendment because I've heard him say: I'm the champion of agriculture. I've also heard him say in this House: I'm the champion of forestry. Well, here's a place, champ. Now you can be the champion. This is the opportunity.

Energy minister, I know that you want to support the energy industry. This is an opportunity for you to stop them from being less competitive. This is an opportunity for you to stand up for the energy industry and say, "As the minister I am your advocate; I'm your champion; I'm the one you can depend upon to make it easier for you to make a living and provide jobs for Albertans and pay taxes," which, of course, pay for schools and roads and hospitals and social services, and you can say: "Today I stood up for the energy industry. I voted for this because I know that it's going to hurt jobs in the energy industry."

11:10

What a great opportunity. What a tremendous opportunity for the ministers who are advocates for those industries to stand up in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and do their jobs and say: "Today I was that champion for the industry I'm responsible for. Today I kept the promise to the forest industry and the energy industry and the agriculture industry. Today I was what I promised to be. Today I stood up for you. Today I stopped you from being less competitive. Today I protected the jobs that Albertans depend upon in the industry. Today I was a good minister."

You know what? I will thank the hon. member that made the amendment. You are providing these ministers with a tremendous opportunity to be able to go out to their industry stakeholders tomorrow to say: "I had your back. I had your back after 11 o'clock last night. I was there in the House doing my job. I saw an opportunity to make the industry that I am responsible for either more competitive or stop it from being less competitive, and I did my job right." Don't let this opportunity go by. I'm not sure when the next time will come.

That's why I will be supporting it, because I care about Alberta jobs. I care about Alberta families that depend upon those jobs. I care about having a place where industry will be competitive, where there will be opportunities for my kids and my grandkids 20 and 30 and 40 years from now. Don't waste this opportunity. I know I'm not going to because at the end of the day – and the Finance minister should probably get his pencil out and think about this, too – this may well cost Alberta more tax dollars for the treasury in the long run than anything close to what it might gain in the short run.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in favour of this amendment and enthusiastically so. If I'm going to be here this evening, I'm sure you all wanted to hear from me. So here I am, finally.

There are some very curious tax increases in this bill and in this budget, but this is one of the more curious tax increases because it makes exporting Alberta goods more expensive. As an exporting province and an exporting country surely we should be trying to make our goods less expensive to get to market. You know, one of the rationalizations for increasing the rail fuel tax, I've been told, is to prevent train companies from filling up their train engines in the lowest tax jurisdiction while using infrastructure in other jurisdictions. If that, in fact, is the case, it seems a little odd that we in Alberta would want the train companies to purchase less of our product. It seems a little bit odd. But it seems consistent, perhaps, that when you make rail transportation more expensive, it makes it even that much more difficult to get one of our core products, that being oil sands bitumen, to market in the absence of pipelines.

I sincerely hope the government members on that side are working diligently day and night to ensure that Alberta oil sands and products of all kinds get access to markets east, west, south: all directions. We need safe, reliable, efficient pipelines ... [interjection] We could go north, absolutely. Pick all four. I have no preference. In fact, if I were to express a preference, my preference would be all of the above.

Let's get access for this product that adds a tremendous amount of value to our society, to our economy, to our province, to our country, and to the world. Let's get that to market, and let's do it through pipelines, which we know are safer, which we know are more cost-effective, which we know are less carbon intense than rail travel.

In the meantime and in the interim we need to get it to market somehow, and markets will always find a way. The way they found is rail travel. To make that more expensive now seems at odds with what it is we're trying to achieve in this province or what we ought to be trying to achieve in this province.

The other thing that I think is important to talk about is this government's bringing in a price on carbon. We're adding a price on carbon on top of a fuel tax increase, and costs quickly start to spiral out of control. I've said many times that I think, broadly, the idea of pricing carbon is a good idea so long as it is, in fact, revenue neutral. The definition we've heard from this government of revenue neutrality is a very odd definition indeed given that the dollars are to be recycled back into the economy. My question would be: would this fuel tax be revenue neutral because the dollars would be cycled back into the economy? It seems unlikely, not by any normal definition that I'm familiar with.

So I absolutely and enthusiastically support this amendment and would hope that perhaps we could convince the government also to do the very same. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to this amendment?

Mr. Ceci: Maybe to continue on with the theme, prior to the last speaker, that the previous speaker was on, today I stand up to support the locomotive fuel tax. Back on March 27, 2015, the previous government brought in a gasoline and diesel tax of 4 cents per litre. The previous government brought that in in March, and they didn't include locomotive fuel, but what we found with the absence of locomotive fuel was that the trucking industry became less competitive to railways. So we have decided to do what should have been done in the first place and not favour one industry over another, as the previous government had done, and we brought in a locomotive fuel tax at 4 cents. That starts on November 1, the 5.5 cents per litre of locomotive fuel, but if you look at the fiscal year, the average for locomotive fuel will be 3.15 cents or 3.25 cents for the whole year. It only starts in November, so there's an averaging down for the entire year if you look at it from a fiscal-year basis.

As the hon. member on this side talked about on the previous amendment, which got defeated, that helps our health care, education, and other services because we are able to have more sustainable financial resources to address those needs. We haven't had sustainable financial resources in a very long time, and we have taken the tack that to be a good government, there needs to be a range of revenues and not just a single commodity. So we have brought in this 5.5 cents a litre for locomotive fuel, which puts us in the middle of provinces with regard to this tax. We believe that it is going to assist us to diversify the revenues and be able to afford the things like health care and education, and we are committed to following through.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, we'll call the vote.

[Motion on amendment A10 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the bill. Are there any further comments, questions, or amendments with respect to Bill 4?

If not, we will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

11:20

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 4. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

(continued)

Bill 4

An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise today to move third reading of Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. I'd like to touch on a few points to recap two important streams of legislative changes covered in this bill.

I'll start with the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. We heard a lot of interesting points raised during Committee of the Whole with respect to the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. Members from the other side focused a lot of their attention on the debt cap, and I certainly appreciate that. We are concerned about Alberta's long-term fiscal health, and we don't want to saddle future Albertans with an excessive debt burden. That is why the government put a debt cap in the bill based on 15 per cent of debt to GDP. Credit-rating agencies see this as a prudent and manageable level of debt consistent with a triple-A credit rating.

A member across the aisle brought forward some interesting suggestions to compel the government to live up to its legislation, and the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake stressed the importance of trust. Budget 2015 shows how we are implementing our commitments over the next three years, and this bill will help us to deliver on many of them. I believe that we will keep Albertans' trust by keeping our commitments and, as the Member for Calgary-South East put it, by doing our job. Madam Speaker, that is why we are protecting front-line services, so that Albertans know their children will have teachers in the classroom when they go to school. That's why we are reinvesting in our public infrastructure and working to diversify the economy, to ensure that we lay the foundation for long-term economic growth, and that is why we are showing a reasonable and responsible path to balance.

For the record I want to reiterate that the main points of the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act along with Budget 2015 will deliver on our promises. They will be that Alberta's finances will be presented in a three-year fiscal plan. The fiscal plan will be presented on the same scope and basis as the consolidated financial statements in the annual report, following public-sector accounting standards and supported by the Auditor General.

The contingency account will continue with its defined purpose, to provide funding for years in which the actual expense of government exceeds the actual revenue. Government will continue to inflation-proof the heritage fund through the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act.

The legislation continues the requirement for a government strategic plan and ministry business plans as well as the requirement that government and ministry annual reports be released by June 30. Regular quarterly fiscal updates will continue with an exception for this fiscal year only because the quarterly fiscal update was released as a part of Budget 2015. Quarterly and annual reports for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund will continue.

The 1 per cent rule limiting in-year spending increases and operating expenses to 1 per cent of the budget, included in the fiscal plan, will remain in effect under the new legislation, and as was debated at length, a new debt cap based on a debt-to-GDP ratio of 15 per cent will be established, ensuring that government maintains a prudent level of debt, consistent with a triple-A rating.

To sum up, the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act reflects our government's commitment to fiscal responsibility and transparency, and it reflects that we're keeping our debt under control, with a set of fiscal rules that are firm yet offer just enough flexibility to respond to economic and fiscal challenges like some of the ones we face today in Alberta, while presenting the government's finances in a format that is clear and easier for Albertans to understand.

There are tax changes. There were also some important points raised with respect to the tax changes covered in Bill 4. I recognize that the opposition put forward some amendments, and I appreciate the contribution of all of the hon. members to that. But, Madam Speaker, we all know that this government faced a number of challenges with the budget. It's no secret that we have a significant revenue shortfall, that has to be addressed. The tax changes outlined in this bill strike the right balance between moving away from volatile resource revenues and protecting the tax advantage that all Albertans have become accustomed to.

Raising the locomotive fuel tax was a platform commitment, one that Albertans supported and one that helped level the playing field with the other forms of transportation in this province. The increase will generate approximately \$13 million in new revenue in 2016-17 and still keep the locomotive fuel tax well below the fuel taxes paid in other industries.

As for the insurance premium tax, this represents a stable source of revenue also. The modest 1 percentage point increase will generate an additional \$158 million in 2016-17.

Madam Speaker, as I've also said, the tax changes brought forward this year provide necessary revenue to help sustain funding for the public programs and services Albertans rely on, and it's important to keep in mind that even with these tax changes Albertans will continue to benefit from an overall tax advantage of at least \$8.5 billion compared to all other provinces.

Once again I thank the hon. members for their input and discussion on this important bill. The changes proposed here will not only enable us to move forward on our path towards balance; they will also ensure that we can continue to provide the programs and services that Albertans value.

I'd ask that all members of the House support this bill, and I move third reading. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Increasing taxes, any taxes but especially a series of cumulative taxes that universally impact the cost of everything like these taxes do, during a recession is an atrocious and hurtful economic decision, impacting the hundred thousand or so unemployed in this province at the worst possible time. I don't care if you follow the principles of Keynes, Hayek, or any other economist. It is never a good idea to take more money out of the pockets of Albertans during a time of great suffering like we are suffering right now. In a time of recession prices should fall. While the supply of money retracts, so too should the prices being paid for the goods and services that they depend on. Instead, this government has added taxes, increasing prices, making it harder for everyday Albertans to put food on their tables, to pay their bills, to make ends meet, especially Albertans who have lost their jobs and those that are on fixed incomes.

This government has ignored our warnings and increased a series of what are known as regressive taxes, taxes that inescapably harm the most vulnerable Albertans, those on fixed incomes. That's what regressive taxes do. A regressive tax is called regressive because people of little means pay a higher proportion of the money that they earn to satisfy their family's basic needs for things like food products. As a percentage of their overall earnings they will be paying more towards this tax increase than a family of higher means, hence the word "regressive." So the very people that this government claims to be fighting for all the time are the ones that are going to be hurt the most by these taxes.

11:30

The NDP is entirely and directly responsible for increasing the cost of every single good imported into this province by train and truck, goods that Albertans need to survive. The vast majority of these tax increases will have a regressive impact. The NDP is literally paying for their pay raises to their public union cronies on the backs of the poorest Albertans.

Government services are great, and the Wildrose believes that they are of the utmost importance and would not have cut any of the front-line workers that provide these services. In a province with a population as industrious as ours and in a year where we have taken in amongst the province's highest ever revenues, providing Albertans with the front-line services that they need is more than possible.

What is not possible is providing these services and maintaining the bureaucratic bloat of agencies like AHS. What is not sustainable is increasing the pay for public-sector unions while the Albertans that pay their wages are facing job losses and pay cuts in every sector every day. We have these ludicrous ideas coming from other parties about our policies, claims that we in opposition would make unemployment worse by insisting that overpaid managers reallocate their skill set to a more industrious purpose in the private sector, managers like the AHS manager making seven figures to dictate the type of art on the wall. What they fail to understand is that taxpayers are paying these salaries for nonproductive and inefficient pursuits, that Alberta taxpayers do not receive any value in return for make-work projects. Instead, the Albertan taxpayer is facing a slow and unnecessary, redundant social system with rapidly declining levels of satisfaction.

You know, we used to have among the best education systems, among the best health care systems, and now we're paying well

above market value on the backs of taxpayers for inferior services. It is time that this government does the right thing and looks inward to fix the problems that our people are facing every day. It is time that this NDP government admits that they are responsible for our province's slow, expensive, ineffective, and underperforming government services. We're paying billions of dollars more than British Columbia on infrastructure, more than a province that literally has to build its roadway by carving through mountains. The government is competing against itself, drastically driving up the costs of these infrastructure projects.

Albertans are not like this government; they cannot leverage their children's future to balance their books. We have to live within our means. Albertans cut costs when times are tough. They do everything in their power to manage their expenses. And while our people are struggling, this government has increased taxes on those same people to run a series of inefficient and underperforming services. What they fail to understand is that every dollar wasted on government inefficiency is a dollar taken directly from the wallet of an Albertan, which will produce nothing of any value.

Government inefficiencies only serve to amplify the dead weight losses inevitably produced through taxation. Every time that we increase a tax, we are lowering the value of transactions to both buyers and sellers. Whether the buyer is paying more for the product or the seller is receiving a lower return for the product, there is a loss in the marketplace, and that is known as dead weight.

Economists have long acknowledged that the losses to either the consumer or the producer are far greater than the revenue received by the government from this taxation. With every tax increase Alberta's economy is losing market value. Raising taxes forces businesses out of the market. A supplier that is otherwise able to satisfy the consumer's needs for a good at a fair and competitive market price will often no longer be able to do so with all of these cumulative taxes. Businesses need to cover their economic cost of doing business. They need to make money or break even or they cannot produce goods and employ people. Taxes change the prices of goods and inevitably push more businesses out of Alberta as Alberta businesses become less competitive.

The same principle applies to the consumer. A consumer that might previously have afforded certain goods and services from a producer such as the purchasers of insurance will often find himself or herself unable to do so after a price increase is induced through higher taxes or new forms of taxation or the cumulative effect of these many taxes. Consumers have a willingness to pay for items, and, especially in the case of economically vulnerable Albertans, this willingness to pay for an item is fixed by the restraints of their income.

What this government should be the most ashamed of is that they have chosen to flaunt that an NDP government's spending is somehow fixed by absolutely nothing. Alberta has a government that refuses to acknowledge the negative effects of cumulative taxation on an already fragile economy with an ever-growing population of unemployed and fixed-income people. We are living in a time when Albertans are already struggling to put food on their table and pay their power bills, and this NDP government is applying taxes that will push these products even further out of their reach. You're shutting down businesses that provide jobs. These tax increases are edging our fertilizer producers, our coal miners, our oil and gas companies, our grocery providers, our farmers out of the market and, with them, the good-paying jobs that they provide.

There is no job plan better for Alberta business, for the creation of jobs, than tax cuts. It has been proven time and again around the world. Businesses are profit maximizers. They know how to increase efficiencies, and they will always hire more staff where they have the potential to increase their productivity. This

government has done the exact opposite and could not be more wrong about how to satisfy the economic needs and the social needs of Albertans. This bill will only serve to compound the effect of every other terrible economic policy and risk experiment that this NDP government is pushing for.

One last time I will urge my fellow members of this House to vote this bill down.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak?

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Deficit spending is a poor economic policy, and it will erode services in the long run, contrary to the government's claims. These are real numbers, real people, and real dollars, and they're being diverted for what? So the government doesn't have to look inward and cut significant amounts of inefficiency and waste? The government is more comfortable abusing taxpayer money than improving their operational efficiency in a manner that every other private-sector company does during a recession.

This is a structural deficit. You cut taxes during a structural deficit. You do. The reality is that Albertans are being forced to contribute billions of dollars to servicing debt. These are billions – we've mentioned this before – that are being ripped from an economic cycle. There's nothing new that can be produced from these funds that are being allocated to debt servicing, Madam Speaker, and they do not go into building more infrastructure like roads, something everybody needs to use to get to work, to move product, to be useful, to work, thereby influencing the economy positively. It's an investment. It creates. It means you go to work. You get paid. This debt servicing disrupts an important economic driver. It's a disrespectful management of our funds, and it undermines the proper use of taxpayer money.

The industries are suffering right now, Madam Speaker. Oil prices are low, as we all know. These companies are counting on every penny when it comes to trying to lower the cost of getting their products to market, and the companies are taking every step to reduce their barrel costs, including layoffs of their staff, any staff that can be spared. In fact, a lot of these companies have taken upwards of 20 per cent cuts themselves in order to keep their companies running, in order to maintain their staff. They've looked inward. They've cut from within in order to be able to manage their own companies. It's a wonderful example of how the resilience of Albertans works in order to maintain the companies' productivity during these times. Making it more expensive for these companies to get their product to market will only force these companies to make more cuts.

11:40

In 2013 the rail moved about 280,000 barrels per day, almost 8 per cent of western Canada's oil production. Without pipelines we need rail, and in this industry right now we don't have a whole lot of other options. Worse than that, the government has made no progress on pipelines. It's not surprising. I mean, we're hopeful, but we have a lot of protesters, and they've doubled down by hiring a number of noted antipipeline lobbyists. Right now we need pipelines. It's clear that in the oil and gas industries the demand for shipping their products by rail is increasing. The statistics say that 12,054 cars carrying fuel and oil and crude petroleum moved through western Canada in August 2015 compared to just 9,086 in August 2013. To be clear, that increase in the number of cars is in spite of an economic recession. Our most important job-creating industry is dependent upon rail, at least for the foreseeable future, without a pipeline.

As has been mentioned before, we can't seem to get any ideas about what pipelines are going to be built. We know which ones are not going to go through, and we can't seem to get any answers about ones that need to go through. Not only is the government kicking the oil and gas industry when they are down, but on top of that, they're taxing one of the only ways that we have to get product to market. That's not only oil and gas. That's for food, and that's for fertilizer and any other products that are necessary to be transported in this country, in this province.

The spokesperson for CP Rail noted that, quote, the increased fuel tax in Alberta will substantially increase CP's cost of fuel in the province; this change comes at a very difficult economic period for the province, and there is no doubt that it will be compounded by the government's other announced tax increases; this will negatively impact future investments and jobs. End quote. The NDP has not done the analysis to indicate how expensive this will be. The government is choosing to strain the pocketbooks of every Albertan to pay for lavish plans and bureaucratic excess. This is not the right method, Madam Speaker, for attempting to increase revenues. We cannot further hinder the industry this way and the consumers as well.

Reducing taxes has a stimulative effect on the economic activity. In fact, as the hon. member had mentioned, it's a supported aspect of the very economists often invoked favourably by the NDP government. You cut taxes in times of structural deficit. Money left in the pockets of innovators and job creators and industrious Albertans will find productivity given the right encouragement, given the right space to do that in. Innovation is born from these sorts of situations, but the government has to support that.

Higher marginal rates have a directly negative impact on innovation and growth and, most significantly, employment, something that I think is important to all of us right now, especially given, again, the economic environment and the job losses in this province, something all of us should be thinking about right now in all of our constituencies. All of the people in all of our constituencies are suffering right now. The result is lower incomes for individuals and less revenue for the government. The NDP policies are hurting Albertans. These policies are killing jobs. This is a tax that is sure to provide a final blow, and this is what we're talking about right now, the tax on the rail.

Just to reiterate, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks has given a great deal of thought and a tremendous amount of opportunity for this government to look inward and to find ways to improve what could be better policy at this point.

Mr. Panda: A spiritual awakening.

Mrs. Aheer: A spiritual awakening, as it was called, or however you want to look at that.

The most important thing right now is for the government to understand that we have job losses and that our economy is suffering, and I urge the government to within this third reading take a look at the amendments that were thoughtfully constructed, that have been supported by this side, and to please look within and to cut from within, cut from the bloat, cut from the bureaucracy. That's what we're asking you to do, to look at that from within and find other places. There are places from within that we can cut, Madam Speaker, in order to create the services that Albertans need and have come to expect. We need to start looking at ourselves first in order to make that happen before we go into the pockets of the taxpayers, who are suffering right now.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, if you seek it, I think that you will find unanimous consent of this House for one-minute bells for the duration of the evening.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Any further speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to rise today to speak against this horrendous bill. This government is asking for a blank cheque to cover their unprecedented levels of spending. We know that this government has little regard for the taxpayers of Alberta and instead sees them as their own personal ATM. We Albertans are a sensible lot, and we expect our government to reflect this. Albertans understand that there are consequences for our actions. We cannot act like someone with their first credit card. We need to live within our means.

Unfortunately, this government doesn't believe in the Alberta advantage, brought in by Premier Klein in 1992 through lower taxes, an investment-friendly economy, ending corporate welfare, cutting red tape, and an education system that was the envy of the world. The members opposite would remember the mid-1990s as the lost decade. I don't disagree that it was a time of hard choices, but the decisions this government makes today will, like the Getty government's, have the same repercussions that caused the Klein government to make those hard choices. We simply cannot burden our youth with the debts from this government's risky fiscal economic experiments. Much like someone with their first credit card, this government will eventually wake up and feel the full ramifications of their decisions to spend recklessly now instead of making prudent, common-sense, responsible decisions, and I can assure the members opposite that a couple of Tylenol won't help alleviate their fiscal hangover.

This bill allows for the government to run operational deficits for the first time since before some members opposite were even born. We make no mistake. The only reason we are forced into this unenviable situation is because the government refuses to rein in a budget that exceeds our British Columbian neighbours' not only by \$2,000 in per capita spending but even in total spending in spite of B.C. having a larger population. We should focus on spending taxpayer dollars more efficiently before hiking over 60 different taxes and fees, that this government raised in their recent budget. Their tax increases include personal income tax, the ND PST carbon tax, gasoline fuel tax, diesel fuel tax, propane fuel tax, locomotive fuel tax.

Look at the locomotive fuel tax. We talked about that a little earlier. That was actually an NDP campaign promise, where they said that they were going to have reliable, sufficient, and fairly priced rail service to markets. Madam Speaker, our resources rely on rail to get to the market. Of course, Canadian Pacific Railway said about this raise that the NDP government tax hike on trains is sending Alberta down the wrong track. They said that the NDP government's budget decision to raise the locomotive fuel tax rate from 1 and a half cents per litre to 5 and a half cents per litre, effective November 1, will cost both the company and the province. That's a broken campaign promise right there.

Other rises in taxes: corporate income tax; tobacco tax; alcohol tax; application fee for public land leases; royalty rates on sand; royalty rates on silt; royalty rates on gravel; royalty rates on soil; royalty rates on peat moss; royalty rates on clay; base camping fees; campsite electricity rates; base group camping fees; dump station fees; Canmore Nordic Centre fee; in-park interpretive program fee; cottage lot leasing fee; industrial-commercial land-use, disposition,

administration, and land-rent fees; permit and special-event fees; on-site pump-out service fees; 15 different court fees increased; land titles caveats fee; corporate registry for incorporations; corporate registry for annual returns; corporate registry for searches; and an insurance premium tax.

11:50

Of course, we just finished talking about the insurance premium tax. This is the tax that includes a tax on vehicle insurance, which we're mandated by law to have, so that's something we can't get out of. For some of these other taxes we have a choice, whether we're going to purchase or use that service, but we're forced to have vehicle insurance, so we're forced to pay this tax. That's not fair, Madam Speaker. That's not right.

What we should be doing is creating legislation that determines how we will save our surpluses, not how we will spend ourselves deeper into debt. We already had a spending problem. At \$100 a barrel for oil the Alberta government wasn't able to save anything. For the past eight years we've run deficits, and the plan is to have deficits for the next five years. This bill will simply enable this government to put off addressing this problem. There are no provisions in this bill if the government exceeds 15 per cent of GDP. What is the point of having a law without any consequences for breaking it? Why are there no protections in place? While there may be no penalties placed on the Finance minister or this government, Albertans will be the ones punished when our triple-A credit rating is downgraded because of this government's perilous spending habits.

[Mr. Feehan in the chair]

In a recent *Globe and Mail* article the DBRS rating agency stated, "We rate Alberta [triple-A] with a stable trend for the time being; primarily that has been based on a strong balance sheet and low debt." Obviously, the low debt has gone out the window. Further, they warned that they would "rethink the province's pristine [triple-A] stable credit rating if provincial debt surpasses 15 per cent of GDP." But let's be clear. The DBRS's version of 15 per cent isn't what this government uses. In the same article DBRS estimates that the total taxpayer-supported debt in Alberta would be \$29.3 billion, or about 10 per cent of GDP. Of course, this government's budget is forecasting \$47 billion worth of debt. Well, this government is at half of that. Therefore, DBRS has us hitting near 15 per cent before the next election, so a credit downgrade is coming soon.

Mr. Speaker, it should be clear to this Chamber why we must vote against this bill. Like a late-night infomercial cure-all, this bill falsely promises a quick and easy remedy to an issue that requires a long-term, reasonable course of care, something like the responsible, gradual financial recovery plan that the Wildrose proposed during the spring election. Ralph Klein famously said, "Never again will this government or the people of this province have to set aside another tax dollar on debt." Those days are over, and the way this government is going, they will be gone for a long, long time. Even Ralph Klein couldn't foresee the path that this government is heading us down.

Please vote against Bill 4 and force the government to come back to this House with a responsible plan that respects taxpayers and future Alberta generations, a plan that we can be proud of instead of the shameful burden enabled by Bill 4.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? No? Okay.

Any other speakers to the bill? Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nice chair. It suits you.

Mr. Speaker, it is the eleventh hour. It isn't too late for the government to change course although it's getting pretty darn hard at this point. The Official Opposition has proposed many amendments, I think about eight of them, which I'm sure government members have enjoyed debating at every moment. But at every moment the government has rejected them, well-meaning, reasonable amendments that would make Bill 4 less bad.

Bill 4 is possibly one of the most damaging pieces of legislation that this House could possibly pass. It is a piece of legislation that increases our debt limit again – yet again – becoming little better than the U.S. Congress's. We are following down a dangerous path, where before even the next election the government might come back to us asking for an increase in the debt ceiling again. We'll be able to say, "I told you so," but the cost of fixing it won't be worth the gloating. We want to fix it now.

This bill retroactively makes legal the government's illegal actions, the Finance minister's failure to comply with the financial management act and introduce the second-quarter fiscal update on or before the 30th of November. They seek to go backwards in time and give themselves a legal mulligan, a one-off gimme so that they are not in noncompliance with the law. Not that it would make any difference, because the government has in the series of amendments we've debated refused at every single turn to accept legal consequences for breaking their own laws.

We've put forward amendments that would limit ministerial stipends if they broke the debt ceiling. Any investment manager that doesn't do their job is not going to get paid as well. It's performance pay. Many Albertans are paid in their regular jobs based on performance pay, and I think it's time we introduced a little bit of that into this House. Unfortunately, the members on the other side are just working union hours. We are working a little beyond them tonight; I'll give that. But they've rejected the idea of performance pay. They've rejected the idea that there should be any penalty whatsoever for breaking the laws that we ourselves pass in this House. It's a principle that I will fight for in the coming years.

Mr. Mason: Is that how long you're going to go on?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Don't tempt me, House leader. You know I could.

This bill changes the framework of our budget at a macro level. It legalizes borrowing for the basic operations of the government, something that we have not done since 1992, something that was so bad that this province learned a lesson for a time. We made it illegal. We made it against the law to do that. But we've watered that down over the years, with the best of intentions at times, to the point where now the Alberta advantage has died with a whimper. Well, there are three and a half years for the Alberta advantage to squirm under the bus, but the Official Opposition will continue to fight for fiscal responsibility, for conservatism, for the ideas that built the Alberta advantage, the Alberta advantage that made Alberta the greatest province in the greatest country in the world, Mr. Speaker. This is what we will continue to fight for.

Bill 4 is almost sure to pass tonight. We haven't won many votes in this Chamber this evening. Perhaps we'll do better on Bill 6. But before we get to votes on Bill 6, I hope that the government has taken stock over what's happened in this province over the last two weeks. Albertans are waking up. Albertans know that this government can't be trusted, not with farmers and not with finances.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude our debate on Bill 4. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Does anyone wish to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing no one, would anybody else like to speak to the bill?

Seeing no one, I call on the hon. Minister of Finance to close the debate, then.

12:00

Mr. Ceci: It's done. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't wish to belabour the – oh, look at that. Midnight. I thank all members for their input. Bill 4 will make a more sustainable set of revenue resources going forward for all Albertans to therefore be able to provide the many programs and services they rely on.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Ganley	Miller
Babcock	Goehring	Miranda
Bilous	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carlier	Horne	Notley
Carson	Kazim	Piquette
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Connolly	Larivee	Schmidt
Coolahan	Littlewood	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Shepherd
Dach	Luff	Sigurdson
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Drever	Mason	Westhead
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Ellis	MacIntyre
Barnes	Fildebrandt	McIver
Clark	Fraser	Panda
Cooper	Hunter	Starke
Cyr	Loewen	

Totals:	For – 38	Against – 14
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[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

Mr. Cooper moved that the motion for second reading be amended to read that Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate December 2: Mr. Bilous]

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. member wishing to speak? Hon. minister of economic development, you're not choosing to speak at this time? I think you still had some time.

Mr. Bilous: Sure. Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is on the bill, is it not?

Mr. Cooper: It's on the referral motion to committee. You're supporting it.

Mr. Bilous: Right. No, I'm not.

So this is on the motion, Madam Speaker, just for clarification, the referral amendment?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. It's on the amendment.

Mr. Bilous: Right. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak against this amendment. I'll make my points very, very quickly. Quite honestly, you know, farm workers are the only workers in this province who aren't covered under OH and S and WCB, and by bringing forward this bill and enacting it, it will ensure that paid farm workers have that minimum basic coverage, which every other worker in the province enjoys except for farm workers. This is a piece of legislation that is long overdue.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to the continued debate in this House, including amendments that will be brought forward when we move into Committee of the Whole. But, again, to remind members: one life lost is one too many, and we need to ensure that those who have been injured while working on a farm have basic protections and coverage. That is why delaying is not the path forward. I think there's definitely a way to ensure that we have a made-in-Alberta solution that applies and takes into account our workers, our farmers, and our ranchers in this province and ensures that we protect family farms. Again, this comes down to ensuring that paid farm workers have the same basic protections as every other worker in this province. Alberta, unfortunately, is the only jurisdiction in this country that doesn't afford paid farm workers that type of protection.

I look forward to the debate as it continues on. I was very clear this afternoon, Madam Speaker, speaking with folks in Leduc, that we are going to ensure that we are protecting family farms and acknowledging the uniqueness that farmers through their occupation, their way of life, that there are unique aspects and elements to it, which we are listening to and that we have heard. We will ensure that we come forward with a made-in-Alberta solution.

For those reasons, Madam Speaker, I cannot support the referral motion. Thank you.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for once again allowing me to rise and speak on Bill 6. I will be supporting this amendment, which sends this bill to committee, where it can receive the respectful consideration and expert input it deserves.

I want to express my disappointment that once again the members across the aisle that previously served with me here in opposition ranks are going against the ideals they previously held on this side of the aisle. Under previous governments we all knew that there was a problem with the misuse and, frankly, the non-use of legislative policy committees to call expert witnesses, hear public feedback, and iron out important details of legislation out in the open. In fact, many other parliamentary jurisdictions, including our federal government and other provinces here in Canada, already do these things quite frequently. They use policy committees to a much fuller and comprehensive extent than Alberta. I think this is to the benefit of democracy.

12:10

Unfortunately, it seems that we are headed right down the same path as previous administrations that preferred to move quickly and without complete public oversight of the legislative process. Madam Speaker, I'd like to remind this Assembly of the words of

the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who said in regard to pension legislation:

First of all, Mr. Speaker, there was not adequate consultation, especially with the people who are enrolled in the pension, who will receive it or who are receiving it now. That's a critical point . . .

I think that the government has shown that at this point in time, at least, it's prepared to make some compromises, and I think that's a good thing. I think that this Legislature and the opposition have proved their worth in this debate and in this fight, and it has shown that we can indeed influence the course of government policy. We can stand up on behalf of our constituents, fight for them, and get results.

Boy, does that sound familiar, from pensions to changing the way that fifth and sixth generations interact with their families, continuing their heritage, continuing the hard work that built Alberta.

In the same debate the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview stated:

I mean, for a government that loves to talk about the word "consultation" and how they speak with folks, their actions don't seem to live up to their words. Although I could stand here and give numerous examples where consultation never took place even though it was asserted, I won't do that.

This government is the latest to amass quite the impressive list of examples where consultation was asserted and never offered, Madam Speaker. So much for change.

I've attended a number of rallies and town hall sessions now where I've had the chance to speak with hundreds if not thousands of deeply concerned Albertans. What I've come to understand is that this issue is not about urban versus rural. It transcends regional and partisan politics. For every single farmer and rancher I've spoken to, it has nothing to do with skirting the need for safety. While this government as per their own briefing materials may have wished to legislate the family farm as a workplace, I can assure you that each one of these families sees their farm or ranch as their home first and foremost. They take a great deal of pride in their home and the safety of all those on their property, as we all would.

What this comes down to is trust, Madam Speaker. After seeing so much conflicting, confusing, ill-conceived, and rushed information coming from this government, there are precious few Albertans, let alone farmers and ranchers, who are prepared to write this government a blank cheque that unfettered regulatory power could offer. The vast majority simply don't trust that you will take this and get it right. They don't trust that as of yet undefined and mostly unwritten regulations will truly reflect the unique circumstances of our province's farms and ranches.

What we've seen so far, even from government members themselves, is a stream of changes and admissions of the sloppiness and lack of thought that preceded the creation of this bill. We have the minister of agriculture unwilling to give his full support to it and calling its rollout odd, with the consultation coming after the legislation was intended to be quickly rammed through this House. The standard line for the government has been, essentially, that we just need to sign over complete regulatory control; then they'll be able to fix everything they have bungled already through unseen regulations.

But then the curtain comes down, and we have the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose openly admitting that – and I quote – the target and intentions of the bill are constantly changing. It seems that he may have inadvertently given the government's game away. With so many conflicting reports posted right on the government pages and coming from the government side, it's no wonder a few of these members have a hard time keeping their story straight. Ultimately, that's the problem. Nothing this government has done

gives anyone any confidence in its ability to get this right or to carry out the will of the people. This legislation was conspicuously absent from the NDP election platform, and their attempt to whisk it through the Legislature has burned any residual trust they might have had.

I would suggest to this government that restoring trust first involves consulting with Albertans in a meaningful way. I'm not talking about the sessions that were planned to take place after the bill was well on its way to becoming law. I'm not talking about going out to sit in front of a crowd of farmers and ranchers and hearing nothing but criticism, then ignoring every single piece of it and pushing blindly ahead. I'm not talking about sessions booked in venues that were far too small, involving bureaucrats who can't even be bothered to take notes but, instead, simply repeat talking points. I'm talking about the kind of consultation that could easily and effectively happen in a true legislative policy committee like this motion is asking for. I'm talking about consultation as a meaningful discussion, a meaningful two-way street. I would like nothing more than to see this government inviting the affected parties in and hearing their unique concerns, challenges, and recommendations.

I don't trust this government to make the right decisions behind closed doors any more than the majority of Albertans who oppose Bill 6 do. They couldn't even get it right out here in the open. Why would they think they will suddenly become trustworthy legislators once they have unbridled regulatory authority and no transparency for their actions? One farmer I spoke with over the weekend put it best when he said that nobody would ever operate his or her business or personal life the way this NDP government is proposing, where the signature on the bottom line is required before the body of the contract is written.

Questions still linger, Madam Speaker. As much as the government desperately tries to patch this broken bill together with half-formed amendments and shaky assurances, we still have no clear definition of what it means to hire a worker and what regulatory burdens would come with that. For example, if a farmer or rancher were to hire a roofer to fix the shingles on the barn or an electrician to install a section of electric fencing, would that operation then need to come into full compliance with every single detail of the OH and S code, that was never ever created with farming in mind? What costs would be associated with this?

We have not yet addressed an issue that many have brought to my attention: foisting an inferior Workers' Compensation Board insurance product upon farmers and ranchers that already carry private insurance. It's no secret to anyone in this House that workers' compensation is badly in need of some reform, and I consider it disrespectful to the agriculture community to mandate their participation in a system that even the Premier feels is broken.

12:20

I know these concerns linger, because I'm hearing them every day. It's gotten to the point where I'm hearing from Albertans outside my own riding boundaries, and I'm sure I'm not the only one of my Wildrose colleagues to experience this. I'm hearing from people who want us to represent them because their own MLAs are steadfastly refusing to take their concerns seriously and to actually advocate on their behalf.

Madam Speaker, this is the kind of feedback government members would hear if they were interested in representing their constituents first. From an e-mail from Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley:

I want to express my absolute and unequivocal discontent with Bill 6. This Government has broken the trust of Albertans due to their lack of respect and transparency that you as an NDP party

collectively have displayed. Had the Government come to farmers and ranchers to discuss the issues and formulate a plan for future regulation, or alternatively if they came with a fully developed plan to present for review and comment we could have had something factual and concrete to discuss. Instead this Government asked us to give a blank page for you to design the regulation at your will and a blank cheque to pay for the consequences of it after.

Here's another for all the government members in Edmonton.

I feel the NDP government is pushing this bill ahead too fast for the enormity of the outcome it could have. We don't appreciate that farmers and ranchers were not adequately consulted with regards to this piece of legislation either.

This next one comes from the minister of agriculture's riding, where, it's my understanding, my Wildrose colleague will be hosting a town hall.

Why, I wonder, if this legislation is being put into place for the right reasons . . . is it being fast tracked through the system without following proper procedures . . . As farmers we have all taken the time to care to make sure our farms are the safest they can be for everyone on the farm. We have been taking these precautions for many years and nothing will change. Please put a stop to Bill 6 or at least slow it down so you can research it properly.

How about another, this time from Stony Plain?

I truly believe that this bill should be put on hold until you have afforded the people of Alberta . . . their say . . . I was always taught that there was a right way and a wrong way to do things.

Your way is the wrong way. Open communication, honesty, and being accountable for your actions is the right way.

We have one from Medicine Hat, and – trust me – this is one of many I've been tasked with bringing to this government.

If our provincial government truly seeks to have an effective new farm safety legislation, then it needs to engage and enlist the farming and ranching community in creating a truly made in Alberta solution and not attempt to impose legislation that might hinder, hurt, and frustrate those who have helped build our province and who provide us with such a rich heritage and the promise of a prosperous future.

Madam Speaker, through you, I implore all of my government colleagues across the floor to please listen to their constituents, who are so desperately pleading for consultation and to provide their input from experience and expertise. You are representatives of your riding first, and I beg you to remember that.

I will be voting for this amendment to send this bill to committee. Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is applicable if anyone would like to ask questions. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My hon. colleague has spent some significant time in this Assembly, and I'm just wondering if you have any recollection if in previous terms, when the government was on this side of the House, they had ever made any sort of comments or statements about the importance of consultation, the importance of committees, perhaps generally around these types of issues, particularly when you saw in the public large, large amounts of feedback. I seem to recall some around bills 9 and 10, which were some pension reform bills, I think. As well, I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity mentioned Bill 10, which was maybe even this time last year, and I seem to recall some discussion around the importance of consultation.

Mr. Barnes: Hon. member, thank you very, very much. Yeah, in the three years of sharing the opposition lounge and on this side

watching a 44-year-old government struggle many, many times with consultation and with spending taxpayers' money efficiently, I kind of remember three the most and the shared concern that I had with the NDP, which was in opposition at the time. I remember when the last government tried to do the law about the industrial levy and consultation with First Nations. I remember a government standing here saying how they had total agreement from everyone concerned, and, lo and behold, the very next day there was some side of 50 or 60 people in the gallery who claimed they hadn't been consulted and wanted several changes. I'm absolutely sure that I remember my New Democrat opposition colleagues at the time, you know, expressing laughter and surprise that the government at the time had claimed that this consultation had happened. Obviously, it hadn't and was one of the factors that, no doubt, cost the last government a lot of their support.

The ones that I think of most, though, are the land bills: bills 19, 24, 36, and 50. I absolutely will never forget the meetings that rural property rights advocates used to have around the province, with 250 to 350 landowners, in wanting to understand the issue, wanting to explain the issue to their neighbours and other Albertans. It was amazing, too, how Medicine Hat, the 63,000 of us in Medicine Hat – sure, we're urban based, but, my goodness, our rural roots run deep, whether it's because we've come from the country or we have friends or family in it. A company came – it was Stantec, I think – and did a big meeting so, so similar to these ones that the government is doing now, bringing people in, sitting there and giving them a chance to vent and a chance to say what's on their mind but, at the end of the day, not doing at all what the people were asking for.

What I like about this amendment: they're just asking for the chance to consult, the chance to come here and in a respectful, proper manner share their needs. I actually have a quote here from the Premier from May 7, 2014, where something had happened.

A week ago this PC government apologized to party members for its failure to listen to the grassroots. Yesterday they backtracked again, this time on pension rollbacks, because they failed to listen to Albertans. It's clear that they still don't get it because now they plan to ram through an omnibus bill without written briefings to Assembly members and without listening to Albertans.

Madam Speaker, unfortunately, it sounds like déjà vu. It sounds so similar to this process now.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak here to this amendment to send this particular bill to committee. I think the predominant aspect of this particular discussion and indeed the entire discussion surrounding Bill 6 has been one of confusion, one of misinformation, and one whereby farmers, that are directly affected by the legislation that is being proposed, feel that the information that has come from this government, by the very admission of this government, has been inconsistent and inaccurate.

12:30

You know, it is particularly difficult to obtain the trust of any group of people, whether that be farmers or any group that you're dealing with, when you're not consistent in what you're telling them. I want to use, you know, just a few examples of the inconsistencies in the messaging and what has gone out on critical issues with regard to this piece of legislation. The question of paid versus unpaid workers and whether paid or unpaid workers would be subject to workers' compensation and OH and S regulations: the initial information that came from this government was crystal clear

that this legislation would be applicable to both paid and unpaid workers, not just the paid, as now the amendments are saying and now is being said was always the intention.

Another area of confusion was the applicability of the legislation to the work of children on farms. The initial information that went out: I want to stress that this is information that went out well before the first meeting in Grande Prairie on November 26. This was information that was on the website at the time that the legislation was first introduced, the information with regard to the work of children on the farm that caused so much concern amongst farmers, amongst ranchers, many of whom had come through the 4-H system, a system that has been operating in this province for over a century. Indeed, it was felt that 4-H would become something that was threatened by this legislation. Now we're told: no, no, no; that was never the intent. Very clearly, in the information that came out initially with this bill, the work of children and the work of children through 4-H clubs would definitely be affected.

Now the most recent thing that has caused once again not just confusion but, in fact, has now caused division and has caused resentment is the exemption for the members of Hutterite colonies. Now, in my practice I work with Hutterite colonies. I have five colonies in my constituency, and I find, you know, actually, my interaction with them quite interesting. They speak German, and I speak German as well, and it's an interesting interaction that we have. The Hutterite colonies have been very clear on this message, and that is that they do not want a special exemption that separates them from their farming neighbours. They feel a kinship with those who share the land around them, and they do not want to be treated in a way that is special or different from the others that till the land.

These sorts of things are causing the kinds of anger, the kinds of confusion, and the kinds of mistrust that are now the hallmark of this legislation, a legislation that clearly requires the trust of the people, not the kind of distrust that we've seen.

Sadly, we've also seen some myths crop up. You know, one of the myths that I think is the most damaging and one of the myths that I find the most I'll use the word "disgusting" is this myth that farmers don't care about safety and that to suggest that if you're opposed to this bills, somehow you're opposed to farm safety. You know, that is the easy way out. That is the easy way out, that when you're showing opposition to this piece of legislation, you say: oh, well, those that are opposing it just don't care about safety. I can assure you, Madam Speaker, and I think that this is something we should put to rest right now, that whether you're for Bill 6 or against Bill 6, you care about the safety of farmers, you care about the safety of farm workers, and you care about making sure that everybody gets home safely at night. To suggest otherwise is disingenuous and, in my view, lowers the debate on this subject.

Just the same is this myth that workers' compensation is the be-all and end-all and that workers' compensation will somehow ensure that all workers will be adequately protected in the event of an injury. We know that the Premier is on the public record as being extremely critical of workers' compensation in this province. We know that she has said that workers suffer and that workers' health and their dignity and their future are threatened by a Workers' Compensation Board system that does not properly serve injured workers in this province. They've had seven months to correct all of the deficiencies in the Workers' Compensation Board, but that hasn't happened. Despite the fact that this flawed system, or at least the system the Premier says is flawed, is still in place, still has not been changed, still has not been amended in 23 days now, this system will be foisted upon the farmers and the farm workers of this province. I would suggest that the thing to do first is to fix the problem with WCB before you foist it on those that will supposedly receive protections from it.

But there are myths on all sides. You know, the kind of hyperbole and the kind of myths that then spring up is, for example, one that came around on social media. I was discussing this just a couple of hours ago with the minister of agriculture. I find this myth to be incredible, that somehow Bill 6 allows for wind turbines and solar panels to be established on farmland without the permission of the landowner. This somehow is something that Bill 6 allows? I mean, that's preposterous. It's crazy. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, when the temperature is elevated in this kind of debate, you all of a sudden get these sorts of myths propagated. They're propagated on both sides.

You know, the problem we have now is that we have these amendments, six pages' worth of hastily thrown together amendments to amend a five-page-long bill. You have to just read something into it. When you need six pages' worth of amendments to amend a five-page-long bill, there's something wrong with the original piece of legislation.

Madam Speaker, this piece of legislation has been poorly conceived, poorly communicated, and dismally executed by this government. They are finding out, to their dismay, that, in fact, governing is not an easy thing to do. They're relatively new at this process, so mistakes can be made. We can acknowledge that, you know, to a certain extent some degree of, shall we say, forbearance should be allowed because mistakes can be made. But the way to then realize that it is in a bit of a wreck right now is not to forge ahead, not to go ahead and just step on the gas; it is, in fact, to pause. It is, in fact, to take time to step back and say: "Look, there are some problems here. We need to basically take a step back and take the opportunity to do some real consultation, to bring in some of the experts."

You know, there has been a lot of work done on farm safety in the past, and I would be curious to know from members of the government: were members of the Farm Safety Advisory Council consulted? Were they brought into the discussions? Indeed, were any of the discussions and any of the recommendations that they brought forward in their 2012 report incorporated into this legislation? Not based on what I've seen in the legislation. No. Yet that particular consultation was province-wide, had representation from a wide range of community and commodity groups, and was provided with some of the most cogent and most well-thought-out recommendations on this issue.

Furthermore, our farmers that have come to us at these various meetings, that have communicated to us through e-mail and other means have given us suggestions as to how farm safety could be incented, how it could be encouraged through a number of means. For example, under the Growing Forward 2 program there is a financial incentive to farmers who improve their animal handling facilities. You know, I've experienced this myself in veterinary practice when doing animal handling. Some people have very good facilities, and some people have very poor facilities. Quite frankly, the risk of injury to either the animal or the operator goes up considerably when facility design and facilities are poorly put together. This is something that, wherever possible, we need to avoid.

12:40

There are a number of a means whereby safe practices can in fact be acknowledged, can be recognized, and can be rewarded, but instead of using an encouraging and educational system that moves the farm safety issue forward, we have punitive measures. We have measures that are intended, you know, to cause things like the shutdown of farming operations sometimes at critical times of the year. That does not move this debate forward.

You know, today we had the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour saying that we want to create a culture of farm safety in this province. That's astounding to me. Create a culture of farm safety? Again, I think this is a tremendous insult to our farmers. What do you think they have had as a culture of farm safety thus far? That's suggesting that there has been no concern about farm safety prior to today. To me, knowing many farmers who are tremendously concerned about farm safety, I think that is a tremendously insulting thing.

Finally, Madam Speaker, there's the whole process of legislating first and then putting regulations together afterwards, a process that the minister of agriculture described as odd, a process that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, when he sat on this side of the House, when he was debating the condo act last year, said was the wrong path to go, that, in fact, legislating before the regulations were worked out was a disservice to condo owners, was a disservice to those who made their residences in condominiums.

Well, Madam Speaker, the situation for farmers is no different than it was for condo owners. This is a bad way to proceed. It does not engender the trust in those individuals that will be directly affected by the legislation that is being discussed.

Madam Speaker, the entire execution of this piece of legislation has been poor from the outset. It has been poorly communicated, and it has been, as I said, very poorly executed. The government should recognize this. I believe they have, given the number of apologies that have already been made by members of this government. If they wish to save face and if they wish to save credibility, not just with rural Albertans but with all Albertans, they would recognize that they have done a ham-handed job on this piece of legislation and they would step back and say: we're going to take a step back and give Albertans the opportunity through a legislative policy committee to properly consult on this piece of legislation. That's the mature and prudent way of doing things.

Now, there will be some that will say: "Oh, you're flip-flopping. Oh, you're blinking." Quite frankly, I think the sign of real leadership is to recognize when things have not been executed well, to recognize when things have not been done in a proper manner, to recognize and to admit it. As we say sometimes: if you mess up, fess up. This is what this government needs to do. This government needs to recognize the poor job that it has done in communicating Bill 6 and in executing Bill 6 and recognize that in doing so, it has insulted the very people on the land that feed us, the very people that provide us not just with the food that we eat but the stewardship of our lands across this province, the very people that built this province and the very people whose pride has been shown over these last few weeks, not just on the front steps of the Legislature, not just in town hall meetings across our province but in hundreds of cards and letters and e-mails that they've sent to legislators right across this province.

Madam Speaker, it behooves us to refer this piece of legislation to a committee so that it can be properly discussed, so that we can have proper consultation, so that all Albertans, not just rural Albertans but Albertans in all parts of the province, can have a proper say and we can properly take a look at this legislation and properly study it and, hopefully, improve it so that it can actually do what it is intended to do.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My hon. colleague from the third party, you know, is a veteran of this House, and I'm just curious to know what his thoughts are. He touched on them briefly,

but I thought perhaps he would be happy to comment on a comment that the Premier had made just last year and some of the change of opinion from one side of the House to the other, when she said:

Because this has such an incredibly far-reaching set of consequences to the lives of so many Albertans, I would suggest that this not be a bill that we ram through at, you know, 4 o'clock in the morning as this government is scrambling to get out of the Legislature so they can run off and slap a whole bunch of ineffective bandages [on] their broken political vehicle.

Now, I understand that it's not quite 4 a.m. yet, but just last year she recognized the far-reaching set of consequences that affect the lives of so many Albertans. As we head towards the close of a session, I wondered if you're just surprised as much as I am that she said one thing in opposition and now another in government.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Speaker, I think it is very safe to say and certainly I think that members of government who once sat here and, certainly, members of the Progressive Conservative caucus that are now sitting in opposition that once were in government will tell you that perspective is everything and that perspective on either side of the House certainly changes. I would suggest to you – and I had this conversation with the hon. Government House Leader – that we have been learning over these last seven months how to sit in opposition, indeed an experience that none of us knew very much about prior to May, in the same way the government is learning how to govern. I would suggest that any suggestion that they can do it right and that everything can be done perfectly right from the get-go is, I think, asking a lot of anyone.

Certainly, the hon. Premier, when she sat in opposition, was very effective in calling for a number of things for government to do in order to improve legislation as it made its way through the House, and she was also very effective in reminding us, when we were in government, that there were certain procedures and that there was a process you had to go through in order to engender the trust and engender the support of, especially, those that were directly affected. I would think that those words would be words that she would do well to remember now that she is in the position whereby she and her government can move forward on these pieces of legislation, that are indeed so profound and so far reaching in their potential effects on our agricultural community, on farmers and ranchers across our province, that she and her government should think twice of doing the selfsame ramming through of legislation, that she was so critical of not more than a year and a half ago.

That is the kind of, I think, learning process that certainly we are doing here in our new role as members of the opposition, as legislators that are interested in developing legislation that is, in fact, good-quality legislation. I would suggest that the government is also interested in passing good-quality legislation, and one of the mechanisms for passing good-quality legislation is indeed having the opportunity for parties to come together to discuss this in a less pressure-packed and in a, shall we say, lower temperature environment, whereby good, solid thoughtful decisions can be made with regard to the legislation that we are discussing.

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

Any other speakers to the bill? Cardston-Taber-Warner.

12:50

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This has been a very interesting two weeks. I have to admit that when the bill first came out, I applauded the efforts of the government to try to address farm safety. I remember that as the whole process started, I took a look

at some of the e-mails that started coming in, and there was one gentleman that e-mailed me. It was a very conciliatory e-mail, saying that he applauded the government as well and thought that their intentions were noble.

The second e-mail that I received from the same gentleman was not so conciliatory. It was an e-mail saying, you know: we're trying to contact the government; we're trying to find out what they're trying to accomplish, what their intentions are; we're getting nowhere with these consultations, or I-told-you-so sessions.

Then I got a third letter from the same individual, and he said: I am disgusted by the lack of consultation that we have received from this government. Now, Madam Speaker, I say that because we have seen in two weeks a progression – or maybe I should say a regression – from one voter, where he started out wanting to believe that the government would do the right thing, wanting to believe that they would actually listen to farmers and ranchers, the people who are in the trenches every day. Yet what he found in a short, two-week period is that the government was unwilling to listen to his concerns and even to contact him back.

Now, we've seen over the last couple of weeks a lot of people upset. We have heard letter after letter, we've read letter after letter about farmers who are distraught about the government's intention to bring this forward. It could have started out, Madam Speaker, with a simple: let's send this to committee; let's figure out the best way to be able to move forward so that all people, both the farmers and the farm workers, are taken care of. I think that this five-alarm fire that we have today would never have been here if you had done that. But that was not done. What happened was that an ideological government dug their heels in.

But there's one thing that the government did not realize. They did not realize who they were up against. Farmers are some of the most hardy, hard-working, and can-be-stubborn people in Alberta. You think that you have met a formidable foe? You haven't met a formidable foe until you've met a farmer, because you're not dealing, Madam Speaker, with a farmer that is concerned about how much he's going to make and that you're going to be taking some of his money from his pocketbook. You're dealing with a farmer that is about to lose that which he or she loves to do.

When you go after the heart and you take away a piece of a person's heart, that's when it becomes personal, and this is the reason why I realized farmers are not going to back down on this issue. They have asked, they have pleaded, they have rallied, they have written letters by the thousands, they have indicated their desire to see this bill killed. The message has been crystal clear. They have travelled from all parts of this province to the Legislature to tell you one thing. They're not happy, and they want you to kill the bill. Yet what we hear from this government is that they are not willing to actually listen to Albertans. They're more concerned about being able to bring forward legislation that will help some other program that they have in store. This is unacceptable to farmers and ranchers, this is unacceptable to me, and it's deplorable.

Now, I received another letter that talks about some of these fallacies or some of these misconceptions or miscommunications, maybe we'd even call them, about Bill 6. Well, the first miscommunication is that farmers have been waiting for this bill for 98 years, and this is what he writes. He says:

I've been on the ground for 56 of those 98 years and have definitely not been waiting for this legislation or anything like it. I live on a family farm and know a lot of farmers, none of whom have been waiting for this type of legislation.

There are approximately 43,000 farms in Alberta. Currently there are nearly 50,000 members on the Facebook page "Farmers against NDP Bill 6."

Fifty thousand members on this Facebook page. I think this almost is the number of our farmers.

An Hon. Member: Do you think that all 50,000 of those people are farmers?

Mr. Hunter: Actually, you know, Madam Speaker, I think the member opposite makes a great point, and I'd like to point this out. This is actually not just a farmers' movement. We have found people from the cities that are also marching with them in solidarity. This is actually starting to become a movement rather than just a few rallies. This is important for the government to understand. Lesser things have taken down governments. This could be the start. This could be the start of the undoing of this government. I think that farmers have the resilience to be able to make this happen, and they are not to be taken lightly.

The second miscommunication that he talks about: "Stakeholders have been consulted." Sitting nose to nose with the NDP government, I can say that I have rarely seen true, proper consultation. In this situation, Madam Speaker, there is no difference. They have said that they will consult, but you can't legislate and then consult. That's not the process. The proper process is to consult, to gather information so that you know the best practices and the best way to be able to go forward. If you legislate and then consult, you have a very good chance of making the mistakes that we have seen over and over and over again with this government.

Now, we in the opposition have said this before, and we've been mocked. We are here to help. That does sound like a cliché, but the reality is that we have warned the government numerous time in past bills that if you go down this path, there are going to be bad consequences. We're here again at the same juncture, saying once again that you're going down the wrong path. The people have spoken. You don't represent Albertans when you pass this bill. Now, you do have a majority. Albertans, I believe, would probably say that they made a mistake on May 5, but you have the mandate. I don't discredit that. You have the mandate. But what are you going to do with the mandate? This is the question. I think a lot of Albertans are hoping that you will say: we're going to do the right thing; we're going to do the right thing for Albertans.

In this situation, Madam Speaker, we have people who have been begging for proper consultation, to send this to committee so that we can gather the right information and make sure that farmers and ranchers are taken care of, not just a certain sector but all farmers and ranchers. Good legislation doesn't pick winners and losers. Good legislation is good for all people. This is the type of legislation that we need to work for. This is the type of legislation they sent us to this House to do. When we don't do it, we do our people a real disservice.

The third miscommunication that he talks about:

"Every province . . . has this legislation." B.C., Saskatchewan and at least two Maritime provinces have exemptions for family farms.

Yet I don't think I've actually ever heard the government say that. They continue to skirt the issue. They forget that these other provinces have studied the issues. They've studied the complexity of a family farm and realized that it's different than a commercial operation. They understand that a family farm has issues that they deal with, the economies of scale, that the way that they deal with issues doesn't work the same as a commercial farm and that they can't be treated the same as a commercial farm is treated. Putting a square peg in a round hole doesn't work. This is the situation that we're seeing with this government and this bill.

1:00

Another point that they forget to state is that as a regulated industry Quebec has the least safe standards, safety numbers and that Alberta has some of the safest in terms of numbers.

The fourth miscommunication is:

“Employees have a right to collective bargaining.” Except, evidently, in Ontario where it was struck down by the highest court with respect to farming activities. Collective bargaining makes sense when there is an employer with a large number of employees.

If we had sent this to committee, we would understand that large commercial operations probably do need to have some kind of OH and S and WCB regulations. The problem, again, is that applying the same OH and S and workers’ compensation regulations for a large commercial operation to a small family farm just doesn’t work.

So it was a fantastic letter that this individual sent me.

I would like to maybe take a little different tack, though, and talk a little bit about a book that my family and I read just this summer. It was called *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell, and I thought it was applicable to this discussion today. Now, in that book it talks about the animals taking over the farm from the humans, who are mistreating them. The animals wanted change. They wanted a better life for themselves. Hey, who would ask for anything less? They wanted owners who listened to them and who had their best interests at heart. In the end the animals that took over the farm turned into the exact same people they had been trying to overthrow. They became the people who did not listen to the animals, who mistreated them, and who did not have their best interests at heart.

The similarities of this situation today are startling. I mean, there are literally goats, turkeys, horses, and pigs outside on the steps protesting on a regular basis. [interjections] *Animal Farm* has been reincarnated and become Animal Legislature. Every single person here needs to take a look at themselves and ask if this is who they wanted to be and what they wanted to represent. They need to ask themselves if this is how they hoped they would govern. Every single person needs to put themselves in the shoes of those on the steps of the Legislature and ask what they would hope the government would do. [interjections] I know that if I were in their shoes, I would hope that this government would listen to them.

Now, I can tell by the laughter and the mocking tones from the opposite side there that they probably haven’t read the book, so I would recommend it. [interjections] It would probably be one of their favourite books because it actually talks about socialism in the light that it needs to be cast.

Madam Speaker, I do want to say that I don’t really want to bring this into an issue of arguing about this.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), a question for the hon. member? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would love to hear more about this book. Would you mind finishing up your story and relay this book forward to the rest of these wonderful colleagues across the row?

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for asking the question. In fact, I was hoping that I would be able to kind of finish my dialogue here. Maybe I could finish here by saying that this is actually, really a serious issue, and I did not want to make light of this. I actually wanted to be able to help the members opposite understand the importance of this issue, and that is that farmers need to be consulted.

The best approach to be able to do that, the best way to do that, Madam Speaker, is to send this to committee. This is what this amendment is for. A referral amendment will send it to committee. The idea that we cannot wait is throwing caution to the wind, and it’s showing the real, true colours of this government, that rather than consulting and then legislating, they are more interested in legislating. The reality is that farmers have been begging to have education, not legislation.

It is extremely important, Madam Speaker, to remind the members opposite that there is absolutely no one that wants better safety on the family farm than the moms and dads who run them, and there is no one who will do it better than they will. Farm families deserve an exemption. I think that if we send it to committee, we would see that, and we would see that they have all the right in the world and that they can have a safe environment for their family farms.

Thank you very much. I appreciate being able to talk about this issue. It is a very important issue to Albertans, not just to our farm families but to all Albertans. This is where our food comes from. This is where hard-working Albertans come from. This is where the bedrock of Alberta comes from. They deserve to have this go to committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further comments under 29(2)(a)?

If not, I’ll recognize the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Madam Speaker, I’d like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Carlier: Madam Speaker, you know, looking at the clock on the wall, it’s getting very early in the morning. We have made great progress today, so I’d like to move that we adjourn until 10 a.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 1:08 a.m. on Tuesday to 10 a.m.]

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Managing Editor
Alberta Hansard
3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St.
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7
Telephone: 780.427.1875