



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 13, 2016

Day 14

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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New Democrat: 54 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 13, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Welcome. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I recognize the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you from the unsurpassed city of Lacombe a class of students from l'école Lacombe upper elementary school, home to the province's most exciting Mock Rock, I hear, a grade 4 to 6 school with both English and French immersion classes. I was pleased to meet with this remarkable group of students earlier today. French immersion was something I missed out on, and now I kind of envy those students who have the opportunity to learn both of Canada's great languages from such a young age. I am proud of my community for providing this kind of opportunity to learn under these awesome teachers. I'm going to read the names of the teachers – and I ask if they would stand as I do so – and some of the parent helpers as well, I understand: Maryann LaFrance, Alison Ferguson, Gillian Marshall, Justin Peterson, Jenn Schimke, and Liz Clegg. I would ask that the students also please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 44 students from Rio Terrace elementary school in the fantastic riding of Edmonton-McClung. These students participate in either German immersion or French immersion programs, and I had the opportunity to speak in both languages with them earlier this afternoon. The teacher group leaders are Josie Smith and Mrs. Rita Sarrate and parent helpers are Mr. Derek Heslinga and Ms Sharon Springer. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the teachers and students from the grade 6 class from Holy Spirit Catholic school in Devon. I'm just starting to get to know this school, but I have been so very impressed with the parent involvement in this educational community of faith. Together the teachers, parents, and administrators work to ensure that all of their students are challenged to learn in an environment that encourages love, respect, and faith. Would the class please rise, and would the members of this Assembly please say hello to these students by giving them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school guests, hon. members?

I would therefore recognize the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Newton & Neighbours Seniors Society, which is a newly formed club with a mandate to bring joy and happiness to seniors and residents in my constituency of Beacon Heights and in the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood's constituency in the Newton area of Edmonton. The club gives their members enjoyable cultural experiences around the city such as visiting the Alberta Legislature, which they're doing today. Every month they support a wide array of local organizations with various donations, so this is not just a social club. The organizations they support include Newton preschool, Candora Society, Edmonton SPCA, Edmonton's Food Bank, and the Olde Towne Beverly Historical Society.

I will ask them to rise as I call their names and to remain standing: Pat Moffitt, Jenny Kolada, Hilda Royer, Michael Rezko, Joyce Busch, Jean Johnston, Mary Schneider, Joe Danchuk, and Audrey Peltier. I'd ask all members of the Assembly to join me in giving them the warm traditional welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to present to you and through you two introductions today. My first introduction is Adele Boucher. Adele was born and raised in the Grimshaw area and went to university in Edmonton and taught for 22 years in Peace River. Adele was married to a local farmer, and they raised bison for 20 years. She also operated a local tour guiding service and still provides commentary for visitors from afar. In 2002 Adele was awarded the Queen's golden jubilee medal. Adele helped campaign in the north for Grant Notley and has been an NDP candidate in three provincial elections and one federal election. She has travelled extensively in Canada and to many parts of the world and hopes to do more in her retirement. I would ask Adele to stand, and I would ask my colleagues of the Assembly to provide a warm welcome to her.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I have a second one. Secondly, I would like to welcome – and I want to thank the Speaker for allowing me to do this – Mrs. Simmonds' grade 5 and 6 class from Bonanza school, who, thanks to the special permission from the Speaker and through technology, are joining us virtually today by way of live streaming, being viewed from their classroom. Bonanza school, whose motto is the Best Little School in the West, is a small kindergarten to grade 8 school located in a rural community of Bonanza and Bay Tree, approximately 580 kilometres northwest of Edmonton, in my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. The school is part of the Peace Wapiti division No. 76, which has its head offices in Grande Prairie. Bonanza is one of many small schools in my constituency who face challenges in coming to the Legislature in person, so today I'm trying to bring the Legislature to them through technology.

I had the pleasure during constituency week to meet these students in person in their classroom, and, believe me, they asked very good questions. They asked me thought-provoking questions, and I very much enjoyed meeting the 13 grade 5s and 6s of Mrs. Simmonds' class. Today they are also being joined by the grade 4s from Ms Spragg's class, and they are all learning about how citizens can work with government to bring about change. I ask the students to rise in their classroom and receive the warm virtual welcome from our Assembly.

The Speaker: If you can hear me, welcome. I thought the House saw that this was something, as technology changes our world, that we may need. Today I tried it as a pilot, and we may need to discuss this matter in the future. Nonetheless, I thought it was worth some value.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you my constituency assistant from my High Level office, Margaret Meyers, along with her husband, Tyrone. Margaret and Tyrone moved to High Level a few years ago after the Slave Lake fires. Since joining my office in January, Margaret has become an avid follower of all things political, so I'm thrilled to have her. I'm so pleased that she's part of my office. I'd ask Margaret and Tyrone to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

I would recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me considerable pleasure today to rise and introduce a friend of this House, former MLA Ray Prins. Ray served in this House as a representative of Lacombe-Ponoka. He's a modest man, but I can tell you that he's well respected in the worlds of business, politics, public service, and of course personally. I would ask now for Mr. Prins to rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a distinct pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you two very special individuals from the Edmonton Public School Archives and Museum, the McKay Avenue school. I've spoken with the culture minister about this important institution. This august institution is a research facility containing records and artifacts from the earliest days in the Edmonton public schools. It's housed in the oldest standing brick school, just a few blocks from here, built in 1904. Some of you will know that this was the first Legislature, this school's top floor. It's really worth a visit. I happen to live right beside it. In addition, my mother went to school there in the '30s, so it has a special meaning for me.

It's currently undergoing massive renovations, and an important institution needs a solid roof, which is now under threat. We are hoping that the budget tomorrow will show some support for this important historic institution. I'll ask the museum's manager, Cindy Davis, and archivist, Lori Clark, to stand for the first time in this Legislature, to be introduced to the Legislature.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

Government Spending

Mr. Fildebrandt: In just a few short years Alberta's debt will reach \$50 billion. That's \$50,000 of debt for every household in Alberta. With interest payments soon to be the most expensive branch of government outside of health, education, and social services, it's critical that we take reasonable but serious steps to get the costs of government under control. Taxes will be raised, not to pay for government programs but to pay back the banks. Today's deficits are tomorrow's taxes.

The problem didn't just start with this government. Alberta has run eight consecutive deficits under four Premiers and one NDP Premier. Despite record revenues and \$100 oil in many of those years, we went from having \$17 billion in the bank to \$18 billion of savings.

Only the Wildrose has consistently stood on the side of everyday Albertans and fought for getting spending under control while protecting the Alberta advantage that made us the economic powerhouse of North America. We believe that government should act like families who are being forced to save to make ends meet. That's why I was proud to release the Wildrose budget sustainability recommendations, a 10-point plan with common-sense ideas that will save our government \$2 billion this year and even more going forward. We can get the costs of government under control.

We are calling for a hiring freeze throughout the bureaucracy, with money set aside for critical new hires like teachers and sheriffs. With job losses and wages dropping, we believe that it is only reasonable for a wage freeze to be implemented across the public sector, which enjoys job security that those in the private sector could only dream of.

While this government continues a decade of reckless overspending, Wildrose stands for fiscal responsibility and restoring the Alberta advantage that made us great.

The Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. member.

Could I again remind the House, as we discussed yesterday, that on Members' Statements there's been a past practice that you listen to the member speaking and not speak at the same time, and I would request that you do that today as well.

Īyāhé Nakoda First Nation

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to tell you and members of this Assembly about the First Nation in Banff-Cochrane commonly referred to as the Stoney Nakoda First Nation. In accordance with their distinct heritage the nation is restoring and preserving their authentic identity by working to eliminate the name Stoney from common usage in favour of their preferred identity as Īyāhé Nakoda, meaning mountain people. I'd like to thank those behind the website rockymountainnakoda.com for their rich history and vocabulary guide. The age-old method of cooking with stones resulted in nonaboriginals referring to the Īyāhé Nakoda by the contrived name Stoney. They are the only indigenous group in Canada that, after signing a treaty, were assigned a single land allocation for three individual groups.

Tourism and hospitality along with commercial and industrial developments are key to the economic sustainability of the nation. In upholding the traditions and culture of the Īyāhé Nakoda, environmental stewardship remains a priority when any proposals for land development are considered. The Īyāhé Nakoda groups nowadays are referred to as the Bearspaw Nakoda Nation, led by Chief Darcy Dixon; Chiniki Nakoda Nation, led by Chief Aaron Young; and Wesley Nakoda nation, led by Chief Ernest Wesley.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud that our government has made a commitment to renew the relationship with indigenous peoples. Repealing Bill 22, repatriating sacred and ceremonial objects, and having relationship agreements with the three treaty organizations are just a few ways our government will continue to demonstrate this commitment. I look forward to continued discussions with the Īyāhé Nakoda Nation with the view to supporting their interests in economic diversification, environmental stewardship, and a more prosperous Alberta for all.

Īsniyés. Thank you.

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

Calgary-Greenway Constituency

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all of you for your kind words and congratulations over the past days and weeks. I am honoured to take my seat in this Assembly as the MLA for Calgary-Greenway.

Within my constituency is the diversity that makes Alberta and Canada such wonderful places. There is a vast array of religions and ethnicities and a wide range of socioeconomic conditions within my constituency. It is the diversity that brings us closer together as a community by focusing on shared goals and shared values instead of getting caught up in the issues that divide us. I hope that our riding can be a shining beacon for what makes Calgary and Alberta such wonderful places to live, work, and raise a family. Many of my constituents want nothing more than to work hard every day to give their children the opportunities that they may not have had personally, and I feel that this is something that we can all agree on.

As we are well aware, the Calgary-Greenway seat became vacant because of the tragic passing of Manmeet Singh Bhullar. Manmeet was a dear friend of mine, who I had known since he was a young, passionate, and inspiring university student. There's no one in this province who could step in and fill Manmeet's shoes. All I can do is to wake up every morning and learn from what Meeta taught me: listen to your constituents, their concerns; work hard every day; and serve the public with dignity and respect and seva, or selfless service. These were the things that Manmeet was passionate about and employed every day. Hopefully, I can employ what I learned from Manmeet to improve the lives of my constituents and my fellow Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Pipeline Development

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week we heard noisy claims that our Premier is not standing up for Albertans and the need for economic growth and the development of pipelines to get Alberta's energy resources to tidewater. This is not true. Under this Premier's leadership Alberta will be an economic driver in the energy industry while ensuring that we are being environmentally responsible, too.

A few days ago our Premier spoke to the steelworkers of Canada and made it clear that we are supporting the development of pipelines using Canadian steel. She spoke to over 2,000 delegates at the NDP Federal Convention and was very clear that we as a government are going to continue to work across all provinces and with the federal government to get our resources to market via tidewater, something that neither the past provincial or federal governments have been able to do.

So let's make it very clear, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government supports pipelines. I support pipelines. This government understands that all Canadians will benefit from the economic success of Alberta. We have entered into an economic age where we are competing with the United States for oil production, and now it's time to get our resources to new markets.

The opposition will say that this government doesn't get it, but let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. No member of the opposition has been successful in getting a pipeline built to tidewater while in government. As the MLA for Edmonton-Manning I will continue to advocate for pipelines and for value-added production in Alberta's Industrial Heartland. These are things that I know my

constituents support. We must get to yes on a pipeline, and that is what this government will do.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

PDD Bathing Safety Standards

Mr. Jean: David Holmes was only 35 years old when he died from severe burns while living in a PDD group home. David had severe epilepsy and was not able to communicate the intense pain he felt when a caregiver placed him in a bath of scalding water. Only when his skin started to blister was he removed from the bath, but he wasn't taken to the hospital for two and a half hours. This tragedy has since been repeated in other scaldings of persons with developmental disabilities. Mandating the use of water temperature controls is a simple way to prevent these deaths. Why has this government failed to do that?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the previous government and also this government, carrying on with that, have been working very closely with service providers and caregivers in the PDD sector to ensure that scalding protection measures are fully implemented. In fact, that work has been under way. It was under way a couple of years ago. We continue to work with providers to make sure that the standards that have been put in place are fully implemented.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the opposition has been raising the issue of scalding injuries for over a decade. The Premier herself raised the issue when she was in opposition. The Education minister actually talked about it as well. Training is good, but human error will always exist. The solution is simple. Install a relatively inexpensive technology. Will the Premier mandate changes to the regulations to make it impossible for someone to be scalded regardless of the training of their caregivers?

Ms Notley: Well, let me, of course, again reinforce the same sentiment that the Leader of the Official Opposition has made. This was a very tragic situation. Our thoughts are with Mr. Holmes's family, who continue to feel his loss, as well as the other families.

It's important to understand that even though there have been clear rules put in place about antiscalding technology in the settings, even where those exist it is still possible for human error to come into play. So that's one of the things that we're working on, both the technology as well as the training, to ensure that there's no way the mistake . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: It's a tragic situation that continues to happen, Mr. Speaker. When I read the fatality inquiry report, I was hoping that the judge would say that changes had been made to ensure that the senseless scalding of David Holmes would be the last to happen in Alberta. But the judge couldn't say that. Temperature controls have not been mandated, and Mr. Holmes's father says: extra training for caregivers is just not working. The solution is simple, it's inexpensive, and it should have been implemented a long time ago. What exactly has the Premier or this minister done to ensure that scalding deaths never happen again to Albertans that are in our care?

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, a great deal of work has been done on the antiscalding procedures as well as, as I say, the technology, the changes to the taps and the actual material. So that work has been done. In addition, though, our minister and our government have moved forward in engaging in very extensive consultations with service providers in terms of how we move forward in a way to ensure safety while at the same time not inadvertently creating homelessness among the very population we are working to protect.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Government Spending

Mr. Jean: This NDP government is taking our province down a dangerous path. Their economic policies have seriously damaged our ability to compete, and to date the Premier's fiscal plan has been more spending, more taxes, and a path to a dangerous amount of debt by 2019. By the time this NDP government is done, the average Alberta household will own \$50,000 in government debt. This will hurt in the long term hospitals, schools, teachers, nurses, and families. Will the Premier commit to Albertans today that overall spending will not increase in this NDP budget?

Ms Notley: You know, it's interesting, Mr. Speaker. I know that the members opposite have come up with a couple of their ideas, or maybe it was the third party's ideas. I couldn't quite get them straight. They can work it out on Twitter, which idea was which. I will say that although they deny climate change, they are certainly very good at recycling. A number of the things that they talked about yesterday are things that our government is already doing. We're already saving through hiring restraint. We're already holding the line on wages that we're legally allowed to do that for. We're already implementing results-based budgeting. We're doing all the careful things that we're going to do. We are not, however . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: We've already seen what happens in other provinces in Canada when NDP governments fail to get spending and debt under control. It means in the long term fewer services for families, increased taxes, and new sales taxes. All Wildrose is asking for is just a few pennies of savings for every dollar spent. Freezing wages is a good place to start or implementing a hiring freeze. These ideas alone could save Albertans \$700 million per year. This is a simple first step and will start bending the curve to get us back to balanced budgets. Will the Premier commit to taking up just one of these ideas?

Ms Notley: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the savings that are projected from their plan have no connection to reality. But let me just look at one of their proposals. They're suggesting that we stop hiring for any vacancies. Now, we already do have a hiring restraint policy in place. Nonetheless, here are a few positions that the members opposite would have us not hire for: a registered nurse in Strathmore, a home-care aide in Fort McMurray, an X-ray technologist in Hardisty. What the opposition is saying is that we shouldn't fill these important front-line positions, and we disagree.

Mr. Jean: We disagree as well. That's why the hiring freeze is for nonessential services. Surely the Premier understands that. If you can save a few pennies spent on every dollar, our budget will put

Alberta back on a path to sustainability and to balance. It sends a message to markets that Alberta is serious about getting its fiscal house in order. It's important. If we put the right principles in place to grow the economy, it allows revenues to catch up to expenses. It protects Albertans from higher taxes and protects health and education over the long term for all Albertans. Will the Premier at least commit to providing a timeline for getting Albertans . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. It appears as though the member opposite ought to read what it was that his Finance critic introduced yesterday because – let me tell you – those positions were not ones that they would have saved according to their plan. That being said, here's the bottom line.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Point of order.

Ms Notley: We will not roll back front-line services that support Albertans, and we especially won't do it so that we can finance a tax cut to wealthy Albertans so that these guys can help their friends. That is not what we will do. We will move forward carefully. What we will do is ensure . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Third main question.

School Construction

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General report released yesterday is a scathing criticism of the previous government's practice of making funding announcements and promises that they couldn't keep. In fact, "the ministers announced new schools, replacements and modernizations and committed to completion dates . . . before school sites were ready." Wildrose spoke clearly and consistently about the broken promises made by the previous government. Under the current minister's leadership the first comprehensive management report on the program was produced in 2015. What were the results of that report, and are they consistent . . .

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the member for the question. Certainly, it's very important for us, considering that we're in the midst of the biggest infrastructure build for schools in history, that we make sure that we get it right. We need those spaces for thousands of kids across the province. The Auditor General gave us very valuable information about what to do and what not to do as well. Certainly, you have to make sure that you have money in place to actually pay for those schools. You have to have those sites in place to make sure that they will be actually, physically in the ground. We've done that job, and, quite frankly, we're very proud of the reforms that we've made.

2:00

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General's report states quite clearly that neither department has adequate systems to plan, deliver, and report on the program; no one was responsible for overall results, so information on project schedules, including completion dates, was not known; internal reporting on project progress was lacking; and public reporting was consequently weak.

The Auditor General is absolutely correct. This must change. Would the minister take the advice from Wildrose and consider tendering a bid for outside project management to provide the two ministries with the expertise they obviously lack?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quite frankly, I am very, very proud of Alberta's public service and the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Infrastructure, and the school boards that take on these projects as well. What we took from the Auditor General – and thanks for his efforts and for using KPMG as well – is that we've integrated and found ways by which we can communicate with each other. One interesting innovation that we found is that we can save \$15 million a year by financing the school projects as they need the money, at each stage of the way. I'm very proud of the progress that we've made. Thanks to the Auditor General . . .

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report states very clearly that project management needs to be addressed, Education must establish the necessary processes to provide oversight of the school building program, Education needs to implement a gated project approval process, Education needs to agree on project expectations with school jurisdictions, including scope, budget, and schedule. To the Minister of Education: has KPMG been hired to get these schools built or simply to consult with school boards to identify these problems with your government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We hire contractors to build the schools, and I'm very happy to say – I've said it before, and I'll say it again – that we're getting bids that are coming in far below what we had anticipated, I believe 23 per cent for two schools in Edmonton public, saving a considerable amount of money, more than \$20 million. I think that the public service and the school boards around the province are doing a very, very good job of this. You know, this idea of contracting out: we know that it was a failed idea to run P3 schools in the first place. We've moved past that, and we're getting the job done in an effective way.

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

Support for Business

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, PC caucus and Alberta business said that the failed job program would not work. The minister finally admitted his mistake and cancelled the program. Business also wants a reduction in taxes so they can keep their current employees. If they really want to show, quote, leadership and partner with business as the minister said, please listen and get it right. To the economic development minister: can Albertans now expect that their government will do the right thing and reduce the new heavy tax load that NDP policies have placed on job-creating businesses?

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

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Quite frankly, again, our government has been out consulting with business and industry, and we're listening. We've decided to reprofile the tool to help spur job creation and economic growth. That is and will continue to remain our number one priority.

As for questions the member has asked, first of all, we'll have to wait for the budget tomorrow, which the Finance minister will table. But, quite frankly, our government has been very proactive in doing a number of things for our economy, investing over \$34 billion into infrastructure, increasing access to capital, \$2 billion through ATB, AIMCo, and AEC.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Well, that was after the cattle prod from business, Mr. Speaker.

In the Premier's kitchen address her advice to Albertans was – wait for it – apply for benefits. Albertans want jobs, not just benefits. Creating dependency does not equal economic activity: this just in. Will the new job-creation program that replaced the old job-creation program be a social program, or will it create jobs to support families, jobs that pay a good wage? Is it more of the same poverty-level program that you failed at last time?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, two points. In my address one of the things that I said, when I was speaking particularly to the federal government, was: give Alberta the tools that we need to create our own jobs and build our own economy, and that's why I was talking about the need for a pipeline. In addition, I talked about our focus, just as identified by the minister, on job-creation and job-creation programs. I can assure the member opposite that, in fact, the programs that are described tomorrow through the budget will indeed create jobs.

Mr. McIver: Here's another tool they've asked for. Business groups across the province have asked this government time and again to hold back on minimum wage increases. Last week, with the circus in town, the Premier doubled down on committing to \$15. We know minimum wage jobs do not always pay the mortgage, but they provide opportunities for Albertans to get on the first rung of the economic ladder. To the minister: will the government now get it more right and hold back on increases to minimum wage to allow Albertans that need that job to get on the first rung of the economic ladder so they can work their way up?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know what I find quite rich is taking advice from a party that was in power for 40 years and failed to diversify the economy or from another party that doesn't believe in diversification to begin with. Quite frankly, our government has been out consulting and engaging with the business sector and with industry, looking at ways for our government to be supportive, to partner with the private sector, who are the job creators. Unlike one party that talks and another party that failed to act, our government is taking meaningful action.

Thank you.

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

Public Accounts Committee Activities

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's public servants make a tremendous contribution to our province, but there have been some troubling allegations over the past couple of days. Yesterday the Official Opposition released a document called Budget Sustainability Recommendations. In this document, which I will table, they allege that \$25 million is "wasted or stolen" by members of the public service. Given the mandate of the Public Accounts Committee to oversee allegations of fraud, a question to

the chair of the Public Accounts Committee: have you received any specific examples of fraud or theft, and if so, has this issue been added to the schedule of the Public Accounts Committee?

The Speaker: Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, I think from what I'm advised that there has been a ruling, a precedent on that.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, questions addressed to the chair of the Public Accounts Committee have to be addressed through issues upcoming on the agenda of the Public Accounts Committee. It is therefore out of order, but I will say this. There's plenty of evidence of fraud. We saw it in the special duty report of the Auditor General from 2014.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try again. Now, I do know, based on that answer and past history, that the chair of the Public Accounts Committee and the committee itself . . .

Speaker's Ruling Questions to Committee Chairs

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think it needs to be made more clear with respect to this precedent. As I understand it, there are some generic questions that can be asked in terms of next meeting and location, et cetera. However, I sense by where you may be headed on the next supplementary that you're going much deeper than that, so I would urge you to reconsider if, in fact, it is not focused on those matters.

Public Accounts Committee Activities (continued)

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do base this on a question asked on the 26th of November by the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, where he was asking about Tobaccogate and whether there's information that would be put on the agenda going forward.

The Speaker: Hon. member, again, if you read *Beauchesne's*, chapter 10, there are some illustrations that give more clarity to yourself and to the House. I think I have to rule, suggest that your question has gone too far.

Is there another supplemental?

Mr. Clark: Sure. I will ask a second supplemental. This time, Mr. Speaker, I will go to the Government House Leader. Having heard these remarkable allegations – and I believe you've read the document – I have a tremendous amount of respect for the people who serve our province, and I want to know from the Government House Leader or the Premier or anyone on the front bench: how do we create a healthy culture within the public service so people feel confident coming forward with evidence of wrongdoing if, in fact, there is such evidence?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

2:10

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. First of all, let me reiterate the fact that our government has tremendous confidence in the public servants who serve the people of this province. Secondly, I don't believe, even in a time of economic insecurity like what we have now, that scapegoating public servants is the way to move forward.

Thirdly, I will say that our government is committed to working with all members in this Assembly through our democratic accountability committee to improve whistler-blower . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

School Construction (continued)

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the doorsteps during the last election my constituents of Calgary-Shaw were concerned about the number of students crowded into classrooms. We know that we need more schools in communities like the ones I represent. I was concerned to read the findings of the Auditor General's report released this week when it comes to the capital planning by the previous government. To the Minister of Education: what did this report uncover?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. I certainly do agree with the member that with increasing enrolment we need new schools across the province, plenty of them. We thank the Auditor General for his investigation. He found schools were being announced without proper funding and sometimes without even proper sites in place. We are in the midst of fixing that problem, building schools, and we've accepted all of the recommendations of the Auditor General's report.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is being done to ensure these scales of delays never happen again?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, our government has moved to better reporting and data collection on all these projects. We're also streamlining funding to projects, as I said, for which we expect to save at least \$15 million annually. We now expect 48 projects to be completed in time for the fall school session, so I encourage everyone to go to those openings. Albertans can count on us to build these schools, and we will do so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Auditor General's report states that the previous Tory government did not include the money necessary to build these schools, how exactly would school projects have been affected had you not put the necessary funding in place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. For example, I know the members from Calgary have seen a surging student population there. In Calgary-South East, for example, they're waiting on 13 projects in one constituency. I mean, who knows when these schools would have actually been built under the previous government? It's a good thing that we changed the government to allow this to actually happen. Again, I'm happy to say that in Calgary, as you mentioned, we have 17 projects being completed by September. These schools will serve thousands of students in the city of Calgary, of which I'm very proud.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Safety Standards for Persons in Care

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are right to feel upset after seeing the report released by Judge Shriar after the tragic and unnecessary death of David Holmes. The fact is that a tragic death like this should never happen again. Whether it's having the technology or regulations in place or ensuring that front-line staff are not suffering from burnout, Albertans need to know their government has the ability to protect our most vulnerable in care. What will the Human Services minister do to ensure that there is better support and oversight in care homes across the province?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. It's an important issue. It was a tragic situation, and my thoughts are with the Holmes family, who continue to feel the loss. Although a number of changes have been made in response to this incident and similar ones, I know that we can certainly do better. There is a safety consultation going on within the sector. The first phase has been completed, and these topics will certainly be discussed at the second stage of the consultation.
Thank you.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, over the past several years half a dozen seniors have either been severely burnt or have died because of injuries. It's 2016. We can and must do better for our most vulnerable. Given that we know the previous government held off on implementing new regulations in care homes, when can the minister assure Albertans that there will be new mandated provincial regulations to help protect those in care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again, Member, for the question. The safety of the individuals we serve is of paramount importance, and the first stage of the consultation respecting safety has been completed. That report was made public. The second stage of the consultation is under way, and they are expected to complete it within six months, before the end of this year.
Thank you.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that we know that the staff who work in these homes care deeply about their patients but need supports in place and given that Judge Shriar found in the report that there's clearly not enough support in our homes to not only prevent human error but value "professionalism of care" – Albertans want more than just assurances. They want to see action. What will the minister do about it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again, Member, for the question. These are all very important issues, and that's why we have put together a team, led by John te Linde, and my hon. colleague from St. Albert, who has worked all her life in this sector, is also part of the team. These important issues will be discussed within the community, within the sector, and recommendations will be brought forward to the government. At that point I will be able to tell the House and Albertans what steps are recommended and what the action will be going forward.
Thank you.

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

Rural Health Services

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our PC Engage document promotes strengthening access to primary care networks to provide proactive health care. Our previous government initiated the rural physician action plan over 20 years ago, and it's been extremely successful. To the Health minister: considering the uncertainty that your review is provoking and the fact that you've finally confirmed that RPAP will continue but in a different form, can you please provide Albertans with details about your government's change in direction?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the opportunity to talk about how important it is, obviously, to make sure that no matter where you live, you have access to the right health professionals, which, of course, includes a physician in many circumstances. Immediately when rumours were speculating about the future of RPAP, I put them to rest. I made clear that RPAP will continue. The responsible thing, though, I'd say for any government to do – and I was shocked that it hadn't happened previously – is to at the end of a funding cycle review the funding that was allocated and make sure it's meeting the objectives for which it was intended. I'm proud to do that as a government on behalf of the citizens of Alberta.

Mr. Rodney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the hon. minister is aware that our House leader a full year ago made insightful recommendations for enhancing RPAP. Given that the NDP's vague musings now about RPAP have shaken the stability of many rural communities and that the review recognized that access to medical care increases quality of life while stabilizing the economic base for rural communities – it's not rocket science – can the Health minister please tell us: which of the rural health service review's recommendations are you considering implementing or dropping so that these fine people can plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To be very clear, RPAP does some very great work, and there is no question of it being eliminated, but it's simply good governance to review a program when it approaches the end of its current funding cycle. We've extended the funding in certainty through to the fall, and during the next few months we're taking the time to liaise with communities to make sure that we're achieving the right outcomes for rural Albertans. Unfortunately, over the last several years the percentage of physicians practising outside of Edmonton and Calgary has actually declined, so I want to make sure that we can find a way to address the needs of everyone throughout Alberta. It might not just be physicians. There might be other health practitioners, like nurse practitioners, that we need to be attracting.

Mr. Rodney: In my previous role in wellness I learned this very well, but I wonder if the minister is aware of this. Given that the rural health services review actually consulted with Albertans across the province already and it recommended expanding the mandate of RPAP to include other health care professionals – nurse practitioners, midwives, and nurses – and given, as Engage attests, that fostering a healthy society reduces the strain on our health care system, thereby reducing costs, exactly when will the Health

minister provide details on NDP changes to this already successful program, and will you be doing this solely in voice mode?

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. That was delivered in voice mode. I'm happy to respond in voice mode or via e-mail, whatever way you would like it to be responded to.

The \$10 million that is committed currently through RPAP is an important investment, but it's actually only about 10 per cent of what we do in terms of investing in rural-specific education, training, recruitment, and retention programs for rural communities. Certainly, it's an important piece, but it's not going to be the stand-alone be-all and end-all. We need to make sure that we continue to consult through a variety of modes with our partners like the AAMDC, which I was very proud to attend just a few weeks ago and continue to get feedback from them as we move forward.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Sport Fishing Management Strategies

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In this House we often hear from this government the desire to diversify our economy. We also hear that tourism may be the next great industry to save us from our dependence on energy resource development. I agree that Alberta's lakes, parks, and communities have a lot to offer, but my constituents have some questions. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: do you think that the current sport fishing management strategies are doing anything to help promote tourism, especially in our northern communities?

2:20

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I have certainly heard from various communities on this matter of tourism and our fish populations. That's one of the reasons why we expanded the Castle park, and that's one of the reasons why we're embarking on a robust parks management plan and working with the tourism minister in the development of that plan. We're very proud of Alberta's natural heritage and very proud of the contributions of the angling community that underpin much of that economic activity.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that possession limits for most Alberta lakes for walleye are zero, pike have a slot limit of one, and many lakes are also zero and given that in Saskatchewan anglers can keep four walleye and five pike, to the minister: with the recent suffocation of thousands of fish and the current fish management strategy, are we now sending our tourists to Saskatchewan along with our workers and companies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, our fish population and allowable catch and catch-and-release programs and all of those various regulations are studied every year to make sure that they're consistent with the science and consistent with the fish population. That's one of the reasons why, as well, we need to ensure that we

are investing in environmental monitoring, so that we can keep a good eye on our biodiversity monitoring indicators, and that is exactly what this government has committed to do.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that walleye are very aggressive predator fish that have significant effects on all other fish species like perch and whitefish and given that in many lakes like Lac La Biche it's hard to keep them off your hook but anglers are not allowed to keep any, to the minister: will you work with Alberta fish and wildlife to at least review the restrictions on catch limits to help communities attract more tourism, please?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. I have certainly talked to the county of Lac La Biche about this matter, and other fish and wildlife stakeholders have brought it up with me. I will commit to the member that we will review this matter, and I'll get back to him as soon as practical.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Crime Prevention

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans want to be safe in their communities. Safer communities is a top priority of Wildrose. It is deeply concerning for me to see how crime rates are increasing across this province. In my constituency a deputy mayor has been both robbed and vandalized in the past six weeks, and in Red Deer various types of crime have almost doubled. To the Minister of Justice: what are you doing to reduce the crime rates and keep Alberta safe?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, we're all deeply concerned when crime affects any citizen of Alberta. We will be working with the police to ensure that they have the necessary resources going forward to address these issues, but I think that it's also critical that I work with my colleagues to ensure that we address the underlying drivers of crime by making sure that funding for mental health, for health care, for education, for affordable housing all remains in the budget. I think that that is the best way to move forward.

Mr. Taylor: Given that a gas station convenience store in Wainwright, located right beside the school and mere blocks from a police detachment, was just recently held up at gunpoint and that normally quiet, peaceful towns like Amisk and Wainwright are turned upside down by crime and since this is a major concern across the province, where can Albertans turn when this very government is not working to keep their communities safer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, I think I'd like to begin by saying that, actually, we work very hard with our police partners. Our police partners are doing a very good job. They are working to address these crime issues. You know, as I've said, it's really critical to ensure that front-line services are there, whether those be services for the police, whether they be health care or mental health supports, whether they be supports for people who have lost their

homes. Moving forward, we will continue to ensure that those things are in place. You know if we follow the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Taylor: Since the Wildrose have put forward recommendations to combat some of the systemic problems that may lead to an increase in crime and given that fentanyl is having a devastating impact on our communities and can be tied in part to the rising crime rate and given that Albertans don't want to hear platitudes – they want action – will this government commit to implementing all 10 recommendations found within Wildrose's fentanyl report, that would lead to safer communities and saving lives?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, fentanyl is an issue that is of concern to all of us. It has a devastating impact on our communities. We are absolutely committed to working to correct that problem, but I think the ways that we work to correct that problem are by investing in jobs for the people in Alberta, investing in the public service. If we followed the recommendations from the folks over there and hollowed out those services, crime would only get worse.

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

Homelessness Initiatives

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's 10-year plan to end homelessness was initiated in 2008, almost eight and a half years ago. The nationally recognized program provides permanent affordable housing to homeless Albertans and offers crucial support services to help them avoid returning to the streets. As a former member of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness I can attest to this program's success. To the Minister of Human Services: how do you plan to continue to build upon the success of the 10-year plan to end homelessness?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. The member raises a very important issue. We as a government believe that every Albertan deserves a place to call home, and our government will work with our community partners, with organizations working on that plan to make sure that we do proper investments and we provide homes to every Albertan.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As per our PC Engage document, taking care of Albertans proactively before they are in crisis is not just the right way to govern; it's the fiscally prudent way to govern. Given that according to the government's own website Alberta's homeless strategy has helped more than 4,400 Albertans leave the streets and given that more than 1,900 housing units have been developed for homeless Albertans, the program's value in reducing crime as well as social services and health needs is clear. To the Finance minister: is ongoing support for the homelessness plan the kind of proactive cost-saving measure we will see in your budget?

Mr. Ceci: Well, let me see. You're about 24 hours and 37 minutes too early for that question.

You know, subsequent to the budget presentation there will be briefings by each of the ministers, and you'll find a great deal more about the Human Services funding in the briefing that'll take place after my budget presentation.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Minister. I've always been a man ahead of my time.

Given that Edmonton's police chief has publicly questioned the success of Alberta's groundbreaking homelessness initiative and given that any erosion of Alberta's homelessness plan will put Albertans at risk and cost taxpayers more money and given that there are ways to make a good program even better by building on its success, to the Justice minister: what meetings have you had with the Edmonton police chief regarding homelessness, and what have you told him about the 10-year plan to end homelessness?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the critical question. Well, of course, I've had the opportunity to meet with the Edmonton police chief and several police chiefs across Alberta on numerous occasions. I've also met with mayors of various cities, with AUMA, and with AAMDC, and I think that everyone is committed to moving forward to address the homelessness issue. In terms of what I've told the chief of police about our programs, for the most part what I've done is listened, you know, to his views on what the impact has been because he is the person delivering the front-line services. I mean, certainly, our government is committed to providing those services, but we're also committed to listening to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans and Canadians love Alberta beef. Albertans also know that our livestock sector is one of the most important parts of our economy, creating prosperity and jobs in rural Alberta. They also know that BSE, or mad cow disease, threatens that prosperity and those jobs in our province. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: what is your department doing to protect Alberta's cattle industry from BSE?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I'm pleased to say that Alberta and Canada have a world-class BSE surveillance system, which has been recognized internationally for the effectiveness of its surveillance, management, and eradication measures. My ministry is continuing to work with industry, veterinarians, and the federal government to continue this good work and to improve and refine our excellent system. I take this issue very seriously. Alberta's beef industry is one of our province's highest quality exports, and we need to ensure that our markets remain open.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta is expected to test 10,000 cattle for BSE annually and given that in recent years the number of animals tested each year has dropped to

about 5,000, how is the same minister acting to ensure that these low numbers do not impact market access for Alberta beef?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont is correct that fewer cattle are being tested. The trend is seen in other provinces as well such as Saskatchewan. Some reasons for this include increased cow cull prices, shrinking cow populations, and perceptions among producers that the program is over. I want to make absolutely clear that testing is voluntary in Canada, and this has not had any implications for our international BSE status, the safety of our herd, or market access for our beef. That being said, my department has launched extensive education and awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of surveillance. More recently we contracted with several private veterinarians to work with us in promoting the program.

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

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Canadian Cattlemen's Association estimates that the BSE crisis of the last decade cost producers between \$6 billion and \$10 billion and given that a case of BSE was confirmed in this province as late as 2015, what does the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry plan to do to protect Alberta's livestock industry in the event that a new case of BSE is discovered in our province?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in a previous response, Alberta has an internationally recognized surveillance and response system for BSE that allows us to systematically determine the origin of animals, any risk to the food chain, and fight any unfair trade barriers that might be erected should a new case be discovered. I've had the great fortune of meeting with some of the folks who work in my department while they were conducting a simulation similar to a new case of BSE. I can tell the House that I, personally, have never been in a room with so many capable experts, veterinarians, and dedicated public servants. The success of our system was evidenced when the last case was detected. Prices were not affected, and our trading partners . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Little Bow.

Capital Infrastructure Planning

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's Auditor General's report made it obvious why we need a clear and transparent sunshine list for infrastructure projects. In her TV address last week the Premier said that tomorrow's budget would be setting out more details of a major five-year infrastructure plan. It's also been one year now since members on the government benches promised a transparent infrastructure sunshine list for all Albertans. Will the government finally unveil the list so communities can see where their needs stack up?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. The hon. member is right. This government is coming forward with a capital plan that will help build communities, that will help build the economy and create jobs for all Albertans. I'm very proud of it.

With respect to the sunshine list I think I can tell the hon. member that he can stay tuned for the budget tomorrow, but it seems that it is dawn for the sunshine list.

Mr. Schneider: Given that postsecondary institutions have shovel-ready projects, many would benefit from such a list. The Wildrose jobs action plan includes a proposal to invest in knowledge infrastructure. Recently the University of Calgary said that they have shovel-ready projects that could support over 500 person-years of employment during construction. Given that this government proposes to spend more than double British Columbia's capital plan, there's no excuse to not include this sort of investment. Will the government commit to prioritizing knowledge infrastructure investments to better Alberta's future?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the hon. member for the question. Infrastructure, of course, takes many forms, and it's a key part of this government's strategy to put Alberta back to work, to make sure that we have the infrastructure that's needed for the growth of the economy when the price of oil recovers. I think that the hon. member will find that if he's patient and waits until tomorrow, when the budget is released, he will understand the priorities of this government.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given this government's ambitious capital spending agenda, the government should give procurement priority bids to include more opportunities for apprentices. Our Wildrose jobs action plan also called for an increase in apprentice usage on government infrastructure projects. Rather than have apprentices waste their training and stay at home, will the government sit down with the construction industry to figure out the best way to fairly incentivize the use of apprentices on provincial projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the hon. member's question, you know, I can tell him that we are having discussions with respect to the question of apprenticeship. We do want to make sure that as many young people as possible have a chance to learn their trade and to become proficient and to be certified in their trade. Those discussions will continue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

PDD Service Delivery

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past year under the NDP government a procurement policy has been put in place related to adults with disabilities. This policy has resulted in a deterioration of PDD supports the likes of which this province has never before seen. It is time for this government to start paying attention. To the Minister of Human Services: why do you continue to advocate for procurement given the massive damage this policy has done to some of the most vulnerable people in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the important question. In all of our policies relating to procurement, our government is committed to making sure that we do it in a transparent and accountable manner, and that's how we intend to do this one as well. We will work with the community and the sector who are affected by that policy to make sure that we get this right.

Ms Jansen: Now, the problem is that you're not working with them.

Given that procurement essentially puts PDD clients up for bid by service providers, even out-of-province providers, who might have dubious experience, again to the Minister of Human Services: why would you reduce our citizens to such a humiliating process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. First, I will reject the premise of your question. That's not what the government is doing. We are working with ACDS, which is the representative organization for 139 members who serve the PDD community. I got an e-mail – I can submit that later – and I will quote:

There is an openness to listening and pursuing solutions together that I believe was demonstrated in the review of PDD Safety Standards by this Minister and I am confident he values collaboration and respects our perspectives and contributions.

Ms Jansen: To the minister: you can say that you're listening, but I'm hearing you're not.

Given the hard work and dedication of those who work and advocate for Albertans affected by developmental disabilities, I am shocked to hear that it has become almost impossible for them to meet with the minister to face the challenges that they are facing right now. Again to the Minister of Human Services: how can Albertans trust you to make any decision that puts health and dignity over politics when you won't meet with them?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, I am in touch with the community and with their representatives. These are all the social deficits which we inherited from this government when this hon. member was the minister of disabilities. All these policies we are fixing today: that's the mess created by the previous government. We are working with the community to make sure that we collaborate and get this right for vulnerable Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

2:40 Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was a lot of heated conversation in this House last fall around the extension of workers' compensation and basic labour rights to Alberta's farm and ranch workers. At the time my office and I heard from some people who wanted us to slow this legislation down, but we heard from even more workers who said that this legislation couldn't wait even another day. To the Minister of Labour: how many farm and ranch workers have accessed WCB in the time since coverage was finally extended to them?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to update the House. As of April 9 154 farm workers have had approved claims through the WCB. Of those approved claims, 61 were for lost time, meaning that the worker was injured so severely that they were not able to continue work, and they have received compensation from the Workers' Compensation Board. With the WCB coverage farm workers are benefiting.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you recently announced a review of the WCB and given that farm and ranch workers have only recently been given protection under WCB, again to the Labour minister: will the concerns and perspectives of farm and ranch workers be included in this review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely. The WCB review panel will be having meaningful discussions with farmers, ranchers, and their wage farm workers, who are new to the WCB system and will have recommendations. The panel will also have access to any feedback on WCB that comes through the consultations, being led by our Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. Our government is committed to taking as long as needed to get good feedback into the system and to make sure that the WCB system is serving all Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that consultations on the regulations for the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act are still being developed, again to the same minister: can you update the House on how these conversations have been going?

Ms Gray: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry is putting the final touches on the consultations, that will include representation from all stakeholders in the farm and ranch sector. We also know that we're moving into some very busy months for farms and ranches in Alberta, so we need to be respectful of those farmers and ranchers. The timing of when things will get started will depend on the availability of these very busy people. These are important issues, and we look forward to getting them right.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Red Deer Regional Hospital Flood

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise today and speak about the outstanding AHS staff at the Red Deer regional hospital. On March 1, 2016, an accidental cut was made to a pipe in the Red Deer hospital's sprinkler system. The response time in this disaster was extremely quick, with equipment being moved in minutes. As a result of this accident the hospital received major water damage. The damage took out four operating rooms – they went offline immediately – as well as 12 patient beds and medical device reprocessing. After the first week they found one more operating room in need of remediation. As you can imagine, ORs are built to the highest standards and cannot be compromised. All this work is being done within a functioning OR system at a major hospital.

Mr. Speaker, as you can imagine, AHS staff have been working day and night since March 1 due to the flood. They have had to juggle hundreds of surgeries, run operating rooms into the evenings, and work around the clock on repairs. They have made sure patients with critical needs have received surgery without delay. The region

has been very responsive to our hospital's needs, with staff from Olds, Stettler, and Innisfail stepping up to help alleviate pressure in Red Deer by taking patients. It has been hard on patients who have had to have surgeries rescheduled, but people realize that AHS is taking all the precautions to make sure that the operating rooms are up and running as quickly as possible without compromising patient health. The first OR came back online on March 11, and the rest are scheduled to come online in the coming days.

I want to thank all of the hard-working AHS staff for their help and dedication during this time of crisis. Every employee in this hospital has gone above and beyond.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Seniors' Housing in Fort McMurray

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend I returned to my constituency of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, and I spoke with residents in my community about seniors' care. I was asked, "When is it going to be built?" and "Was it cancelled?" I was disappointed to have to tell my constituents that this NDP government still won't provide any answers on this important issue. In fact, it seems like not much has changed since the last government. We're still being told to sit tight while time is wasted on needless bureaucratic delays. This is a project which already has assessments. It already has allocated money and a prime location across the street from the hospital, close to all amenities, from shopping to major public transit routes. It is time that we act now.

All Albertans deserve to age in dignity and, for those who require palliative care, in a safe living environment, which is not in a hospital. Seniors who have built our province and have lived in Fort McMurray all of their lives deserve a home where they can age with dignity. This project, to be built on the site known as Willow Square, has the ability to address seniors' residential needs for the next 20 years if it is done properly. To do this properly, you should consult with the community, with the seniors of Fort McMurray, and with the municipality of Wood Buffalo. Until this project is built, the local hospital, the Northern Lights health centre, must accept the burden of housing for long-term care residents, taking away much-needed acute-care beds from this isolated community north of Edmonton, a staggering 450 kilometres away.

This government must recognize that ensuring that seniors are able to have a good quality of life is a priority. This shouldn't be a partisan issue. The community needs this place for their seniors as it was promised to them. Now it's up to this government to keep that promise. We must not forget that this government's local NDP candidate in Fort McMurray also campaigned on Willow Square. It's time for this government to do right by the seniors of Fort McMurray, not only to answer their questions about the Willow Square facility but also to take the necessary steps to take this project and move it forward.

Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I would like to report that the Standing Committee on Private Bills has had a certain bill under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that Bill Pr. 1, the Bow Valley Community

Foundation Repeal Act, proceed in the Assembly. I request the concurrence of the Assembly in this recommendation.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All in agreement, say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: All opposed, say no. So ordered.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Minister of Status of Women.

Bill 8

Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2016

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2016.

The Fair Trading Act is Alberta's primary consumer protection legislation to safeguard Albertans from unfair business practices and to promote a level playing field in consumer transactions. Under the act the minister may establish regulatory schemes for certain types of businesses and create regulatory organizations to whom powers, duties, or functions set out in the legislation may be delegated.

The proposed amendments will enhance ministerial oversight of delegated regulatory organizations in a manner similar to other legislation. The provisions of this bill are necessary to ensure that organizations delegated responsibility for consumer protection are held to a high standard.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

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

2:50

Bill 9

An Act to Modernize Enforcement of Provincial Offences

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce first reading of Bill 9, An Act to Modernize Enforcement of Provincial Offences.

Bill 9 proposes amendments to the Provincial Offences Procedure Act and the Traffic Safety Act that will streamline and simplify how our provincial laws and bylaws are managed. These amendments will help protect vulnerable Albertans and create efficiencies in our ticketing process.

Mr. Speaker, the first amendment serves to end the outdated process of jailing individuals to enforce tickets for minor infractions. Under the amended legislation Albertans will not be arrested for failing to respond to their ticket, nor will they face jail time for failing to pay a fine for a minor infraction.

The second amendment will enable the expansion of electronic ticketing in Alberta. These amendments will help ensure that the thousands of hours spent annually by police, courts, and corrections staff processing warrants for minor infractions are dedicated to more urgent and serious matters. The change to the e-ticketing will help to ensure that processing times for tickets are simple and errors are reduced.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The minister of Strathmore-Brooks. The Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm always pleased to rise as the minister for Strathmore-Brooks, Mr. Speaker.

I have several documents to table today, so if you'll please entertain me. First, I'm very proud to table the Wildrose 2016 budget sustainability recommendations. I have five copies of the document here. There are 10 points laid out by the Official Opposition to move Alberta back towards budget sustainability. This would bring a \$2 billion reduction in operational spending from the baseline of last year's budget. Moving forward, this would continue to build savings in a direction of a balanced budget in this province, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to table these now.

Further, the Member for Calgary-Elbow graciously was interested in my role as Public Accounts chair during question period today. Unfortunately, while the questions were ruled out of order, it's a topic near and dear to my heart, fraud or malfeasance within the government of Alberta. I'm happy to table . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, could you just clarify where you're headed with this?

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm tabling documents.

The Speaker: The documents being what?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Auditor General's reports.

Mr. Speaker, the member was asking about examples of government fraud within . . .

The Speaker: Table the report. There's no need for references, particularly since it was out of order.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm happy to table five copies of the Auditor General's report of August 2014, Special Duty Report on the Expenses of the Office of Premier Redford and Alberta's Air Transportation Services Program, a clear example of corruption and possibly fraud within the government as well as . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, have you got the report tabled? Have you already finished?

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm tabling it here.

The Speaker: Then do it.

Mr. Fildebrandt: As well, five copies of an article from the *Calgary Herald*, titled *Disgraced Alberta Public Servant Now Faces Charges in Manitoba*, regarding the former executive director of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission who was sentenced to three and a half years in prison.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling five copies of the list of unproclaimed legislation under the Statutes Repeal Act. The Statutes Repeal Act was intended to spur review of all legislation that remained unproclaimed for an extended period of time. Upon review unproclaimed legislation may be found to be unnecessary or obsolete, and repealing it may help to reduce legislative confusion and duplication. The act requires the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to table a report listing the unproclaimed legislation for all departments that is more than five

years old. The report I am tabling lists all unproclaimed legislation passed prior to January 1, 2011.

Legislation on this list will automatically be repealed on December 31, 2016. However, if legislation is still required, the repeal can be avoided as follows: the legislation can be proclaimed into force on or before December 31, 2016, or the Legislative Assembly can adopt a resolution that the legislation not be repealed. This ensures that any useful or necessary legislation can be retained. My ministry has been communicating with the departments responsible for any unproclaimed legislation to ensure that they are aware of the options and are taking the necessary action.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table the required number of copies of the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal 2015 annual report. As you know, the appeal tribunal is a quasi-judicial body with a mandate to resolve disputes over land and membership and other bylaws set out by the Metis Settlements General Council. The tribunal promotes self-governance, certainty, and respect within Alberta's eight Métis settlements. In tabling this report, I wish to thank the tribunal for the important work that it does preserving and enhancing Métis self-governance under the laws of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent to waive 7(7) to extend our daily Routine past 3 p.m.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a document published by the Mining Association of Canada taking the position of calling on governments, in fact, to "establish a broad-based carbon price" that is "revenue neutral" and to "address competitiveness and carbon leakage concerns." Its revenue neutrality is defined

by investing revenues generated through carbon pricing into the development of lower emission technologies to manage the transition to a lower carbon future, including climate adaptation, and to ensure a level playing field for trade-exposed industries.

I would like to table the requisite number of copies.

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move on, I would like to first of all mention that I reminded the House yesterday as well as today that during Member's Statements the past practice and tradition of this place have been that you listen attentively and not interrupt. I, in fact, noted in one of those statements today that the noise in the House during one of the speakers was excessive, and I believe I should have stepped in on that at an earlier stage. Again I remind you of the common principle: respect and treat the same on both sides.

There was also a point of order that was made today. The Member for Strathmore-Brooks, I believe. Is that correct?

Opposition House Leader, are you doing it on behalf of the member?

Mr. Cooper: I certainly am today, sir.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on Standing Order 23, essentially language that's going to cause disorder in the Chamber. During question period the Premier made an allegation that the opposition wouldn't replace front-line workers that were essential to the operations of the province. I'd just like to highlight two quick statements that would give some indication that her statement was untrue: "By implementing a broad hiring freeze across the government (with exceptions only for essential employees)." That can be found on page 3 of the document. On page 4 of the document:

There should . . . be no expansion of positions across the public sector except in rare cases such as for needed front line health workers, . . .

As the Premier specifically referred to front-line health workers in a number of communities, including Hardisty and some other areas around the province.

. . . or new teachers and teacher assistants to meet enrolment growth and to staff new schools.

3:00

The Premier, from time to time, likes to make allegations against this side of the House, particularly of what she may or not believe to be true, and, in fact, misleads the House with some of her statements. Clearly, this is not just a matter of debate because the statement of this side of the House is clear in the document that was just tabled by the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. It's my hope, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier will take some time to read the document as opposed to just making allegations about what this side of the House would or would not do. There is one side of this House that is currently in the process of laying off front-line workers – they are the only ones that have that ability – and it's the government.

The Speaker: Hon. member, could you clarify again? Section 23: which subsection?

Mr. Cooper: Subsection (h), (i), and (j), or whatever it is: uses language that is "likely to create disorder," "imputes false or unavowed motives" – that could be possible – or "makes allegations against another Member." Clearly, that's what happened today when the Premier made allegations about what we would and would not do.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll rise and begin by cautioning my friend across the way as far as allegations and his comments toward the Premier because the very document that he just cited actually contradicts itself. I will draw attention to page 2 of the very document, that says that there will be "no increases on wages or positions for the rest of the public sector beyond new teachers." Well, the public-sector workers that the Premier was referring to were a registered nurse in Strathmore, a home-care aide in Fort McMurray, and an X-ray technician in Hardisty. Those three are nonteachers. Yet page 3 in the very same document then goes on to talk about "a broad hiring freeze . . . with exceptions only for essential employees." Either it's only for teachers, or teachers suddenly have become essential employees. I'm not quite sure of the definition of essential.

That brings me to my point, Mr. Speaker, and to why this is not a point of order. Quite frankly, people disagree – and when I say "people," I'm talking about this also going through many different systems – on the definition of essential services. There is much disagreement. There is no one universal definition of essential

services. It is an opinion. It's a difference of opinion, which again brings me back to the point here, right now, that this is not a point of order. This is a difference of opinion about essential services. Therefore, like I said, this isn't a point of order.

I'll just remind you, Mr. Speaker, that you've made several rulings over the past couple of weeks as far as differences of opinions. You yourself have ruled that "a dispute amongst members on the facts surrounding [an] issue [is] more a question of debate, not a point of order." That was what you had spoken of on April 12 this week. Therefore, this is not a point of order; this is a difference of opinion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: New information to cite to the point. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, is there new, additional information?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I congratulate the member for being able to read the cover page, pages 2 and 3, but he has not read page 4. On page 2 the member is referring to highlights, bullet points, high-level points of the document. I congratulate him on reading the highlights. Then in the weightier aspects of the document it says: for essential employees such as teachers. On page 4, if he were to have made it as far as page 4, the member would see that there is "no expansion of positions across the public sector except in . . . cases such as for needed front line health workers, or new teachers and teaching assistants." Very clearly, this is not a matter of debating an interpretation of a document. It's in black and white if the member would read as far as page 4.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. It is my view, in listening to what I've heard, that the point of order was raised in response to the Premier's comment about the Wildrose policy. In my view, there is no point of order. This is a dispute of facts and a difference of opinion similar to the ones that we've dealt with.

Sections 23(h), (i), (j), and (k) seem to have come up in this House a lot of late, and they continue to be referenced. The relevant citation, that all members may draw their attention to, page 510 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, in fact, suggests that these kinds of points should not use the point of order to engage in debate on an issue. I therefore would rule that there is no point of order.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

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

Bill 5

Seniors' Home Adaptation and Repair Act

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to continue on what I was speaking about this morning. I rise today to speak to Bill 5 in Committee of the Whole. Protecting our seniors is something that all Albertans are in favour of, and I believe that all members of this Assembly are in agreement that seniors should be afforded every opportunity to age in place for as long as possible. However, this bill has so many problems with it that as it stands, it cannot reasonably be supported. As my colleagues and I have indicated to

the minister in second reading, this is a bill without any substance to it

I've heard member after member on the other side rise to speak to the value of the \$75,000 income threshold, rise to speak to the \$40,000 loan maximum, rise to speak about the wonderful grant component, and rise to speak about all of the consumer protection mechanisms in this bill. I take exception to this because, actually, we are voting on giving the minister the power to establish all of these rules in the regulations. We are not actually voting on the numbers themselves.

For instance, the \$75,000 income threshold: we are debating the minister's promises because there is no hard number in the legislation itself. For the \$40,000 loan maximum, again we are debating the minister's promises because there is no hard number in the legislation itself. For the grant we have no figures on exactly how much the maximum amount will be or exactly how the \$2 million promise will be disbursed. Again, we have vague talk from the minister with no specifics, and – it's a big surprise – there are no hard numbers and no concrete details in the legislation itself.

For consumer protections what we have are a lot of rules around contracts being cancelled, and we have an emphasis on the contractors' responsibility to educate seniors on the government's complicated home equity loan program. Not surprisingly, this government has paid little heed to the construction industry. In fact, five pages of the 12-page bill are focused on restrictions and responsibilities that this government is placing on contractors.

Madam Chair, here we are in Committee of the Whole debating a bill with huge implications for seniors, for industry, and Alberta's taxpayers. Looking at the bill itself, it is clear that the only thing this government is prepared to legislate is the role of and restrictions on industry, while at the same time it isn't prepared to legislate what the government's roles would be. This is a double standard and typical of an NDP government's antibusiness approach.

3:10

In the minister's press announcement she was asked how much the government expects to loan out in total under this program, what this full amount will be from the government's perspective. She was unable to provide a firm answer, but she did state that you can multiply the number of eligible households by the loan amount. That is exactly the problem. The minister herself was not sure of the parameters of this program. Originally, she had stated that this program would have an eligibility of up to 145,000 households. Multiply those seniors' households by the stated maximum amount of \$40,000, as the minister suggested. I would ask the government side to consider these numbers and see if they can provide a simple calculation.

Yesterday the government reported that the actual expected uptake number is only around 5,000 people and that this would equal a taxpayer-funded liability of around \$200 million. That's a substantially different figure, and frankly it's worrying to see this government give such widely different answers to simple questions like these. How can we be expected to vote on a government bill with little to no insight into the actual or expected numbers or the parameters? I realize that the members opposite may have blind faith in their government, but let's make something clear. The people of Alberta absolutely do not. The faith and trust that Albertans gave to this government a year ago are quickly dissipating as risky ideology and failed policies have come forward from this radical government again and again.

Madam Chair, I'd like to echo a few concerns that I've heard over the course of my stakeholder outreach. This government is getting into the business of high-risk lending and is forcing contractors to take on the lion's share of consumer education, outreach, and work.

This first point comes from the fact that there are currently products on the financial market for seniors and homeowners to access in cases where they do not necessarily qualify for a traditional loan.

As my colleagues and I have mentioned before, we just think that we need more time to consider this legislation from all angles and to hear from all experts in finance to learn more about the home equity loans and the risks that may be involved here. In second reading the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills recommended that this bill be sent to committee for more consideration, but that motion was defeated.

Another question I'd like to ask here in the Committee of the Whole is whether the government has considered the problems that may arise by taking on a loan program directly. Currently Alberta Treasury Branches is responsible for the seniors' property tax deferral program, so I'm wondering why that hasn't been considered here. It presents an option for the government to use already existing financial infrastructure instead of duplicating services and mechanisms in the bureaucracy. I'd like to hear more about this option from the members opposite.

The third issue that I've heard about has to do with the \$75,000 income threshold, which is for both couples and single seniors. I've heard a number of questions about how the government came up with this figure and why they're getting into the business of providing home equity loans to single seniors with incomes of up to \$75,000 a year when they would more than qualify for a competitive, market-based rate.

Madam Chair, these are just some of the many problems with this bill.

We need to remember that our seniors are the ones who built this province. They are the ones who have passed on good Albertan principles such as freedom, family, hard work, and compassion. Seniors' ability to age in place is something that I certainly want to support. However, I believe that we need to be looking at better options than what is presented here in this bill. Rather than competing with the market, we should focus on creating a real strategy for those with the greatest financial hardship. We have still not heard all the details of the grant component, which is for the most vulnerable, but this government did cancel the previous grants that were available for the most vulnerable seniors.

This isn't all of it, Madam Chair. There are many more questions I could ask, but I would like to now give the government the chance to respond to the points that I have raised.

Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Mr. Cyr: Madam Chair, it is my honour to rise and speak on Bill 5, the Seniors' Home Adaptation and Repair Act. I'd like to start by noting how incredibly grateful I am to our senior citizens for all that they have given to our wonderful province. The seniors are the ones who built this province, which we've heard many times from our side, and through their hard work, dedication, and sacrifice they deserve to be protected and supported. World-class care for seniors is one of the core principles of the Wildrose Party. I can see that this government also sees the value of our seniors and that this legislation comes from a good place. I see that they feel for and want to help seniors, which is why this debate on this bill is so important.

The ability for our seniors to age in their homes is an important part of supporting our mothers, our fathers, our grandparents, and it's commendable that this government has taken up the cause. The unfortunate reality, however, is that once again this government is trying to rush through experimental legislation without taking the essential time to do the foundational work. This is precisely the

legislation that should be sent to a standing committee. This program is untried, untested, and many of the details remain fuzzy, and this is simply unacceptable. These are real people with real homes, real lives, and real bills to pay, and they should be able to count on consistency and reliability of well-planned-out, thoroughly researched and tested legislation.

For myself, I have worked doing personal taxes for 15 years. I have worked with a lot of vulnerable seniors throughout my career. My concern is that when these seniors finally need to move on to the next step of their lives, they're not going to have the ability to be able to continue with the lifestyle that they are going to need. We won't be in essence protecting these seniors in their time of the most need because they'll already be in long-term care. We are taking equity from the houses that will later serve as income for these senior citizens. Many senior citizens that came through my office, the low-income, the most vulnerable, had between \$10,000 and \$12,000 per year in income. They need the equity from their homes to continue on to that next stage.

Now, the other problem in all of this, taking equity out of your home and using it for repairs, is that normally repairing your home doesn't add to the value of your home. Once all the equity is gone, then really there's nothing to protect that senior should home prices go down in, let's say – I don't know – a low-oil environment. You will lose, like in my riding, 22 per cent of the value of your home. This is a concern because now we've got a senior that is overleveraged. That is a problem because then we've got seniors going into bankruptcy. Bankruptcy.

Now, we've seen this government time and again move forward with broad-based, unsubstantiated legislation. These changes will have real and meaningful impacts on the daily lives of Albertans. This cycle of legislating first and figuring out the regulations or details later, in fact, does not make for an accountable, transparent, or reliable government.

3:20

With so many details not worked out yet, this is taking a risk with the most vulnerable part of Alberta's residents, Alberta's senior citizens, again, people that have built this province. Implementing a program for seniors that has not been proven to be economically sustainable does not do them any favours in the long term. Having to renege on promises made now could prove to be devastating for seniors in terms of their financial planning and ability to provide for themselves, which is something that I've already mentioned. If this program is not financially viable long term, it will do far more damage than good.

If the Alberta government decides that this isn't working for it, what exactly happens to these loans? Do we suddenly turn them over to a bank? The bank is not going to accept loans that don't actually bring any profit; they bring too much risk. These are exactly the kinds of things that got passed down in the United States when the subprime loans went through. When Alberta is in billions of dollars' worth of debt and can barely afford its own interest payments, it will be programs exactly like this that will be cut. In this economy we cannot afford to be reckless and thoughtless with commitments in legislation today for things that we will have to pay out some day in the future.

I truly believe that it is imperative that this bill and its implications be studied further to ensure that we protect the interests of both the Alberta government and its most vulnerable citizens. According to this bill we could affect up to 145,000 households.

I have questions regarding the personnel required to properly monitor and maintain this program. Has the minister fully laid out the costs and long-term commitments associated with this program?

It is large and complex. Who is eligible for grant versus loan? What will the interest rates be? The list goes on. This is a key piece of legislation. The minister should be able to clearly and concisely answer now. If she is so confident in this program, why are all the details of this bill to be decided later? Are we voting on a bill, or are we voting on an idealistic idea? They are two different things.

I am personally of the opinion that the bulk of the bill should not be created after the bill and that we should have gone to a standing committee, which would fully debate this legislation. As representatives of this province we have a duty to our constituents to do our due diligence and ensure the legislation that we are passing in this Legislature will be recognized to its fullest extent.

Now, we have heard already from one of my fellow members that this legislation has a range of costs, just for the loans themselves, of approximately \$200 million to \$5.8 billion. That's like throwing darts at a dartboard with a blindfold on and hoping that you hit it. The fact is that we start looking at what exactly we're going to need to help facilitate this program. I started to look at it, and I did a quick calculation. One loan per hour, eight per day, 40 per week, four weeks in a month, 11 months in a year: that works out to be 1,760 loans per year.

An Hon. Member: What happened to December?

Mr. MacIntyre: They're on holidays.

Mr. Cyr: We do give holidays in our government.

When we start even looking at the lowest one, which is 5,000 loans sent out, well, that's three employees. It doesn't seem like a lot, three employees. Then I went and I talked with a friend that's a loans officer, and she said: Scott, it takes a lot longer than an hour to get a loan done; loans officers normally get a loan done about 20 times a month. So when you start looking at 11 months, again, for that same employee at 20 loans per month, that's 220 loans for the year. That's 23 loans officers getting paid probably – I'm going to estimate – \$80,000 a year. We're looking at \$2 million just for the loans officers. We're not talking about the senior loans officers. We're not talking about the loans managers. We're not talking about the CEO that's probably going to need to be set up here. That's just for the loans officers: \$2 million on the \$200 million.

Now, if we look at the highest for the loans officers, that would be 660 that we would need. That's \$53 million. Now, I understand and I agree that it's unlikely that every household is going to take a loan – that's unreasonable – but we've got a range now. We know probably what the minimum is going to be, and we know what the maximum is going to be.

This is where my next point comes in. Instead of just leaving this to luck and throwing at that dartboard with a blindfold on, maybe we should put some kind of a maximum on this so that we can protect the taxpayers from unlimited liability.

Finally, we've heard about the new loans program reducing the amounts that we provided under the grants program, and this will be about a \$6 million reduction to that program. The problem is that we don't have a good price tag on the administration of this program, which has already gone through, on how much it will cost, on how it will be rolled out exactly. In the end, we have no plan. This, actually, with a rollout of July 1, seems very unreasonable for the scope of what we're trying to do.

Let's do our research on these bills and ensure that we can deliver on the promises that we make. Why would we want to let down the seniors like we let down the people that were looking for jobs? We came up with the wonderful \$5,000 for every new employee. We told you that it wouldn't work. It didn't work because the plan just wasn't right. You didn't go to the right people to get the answers

you needed. Had you done that, you would have found out. Now that's cancelled. Coincidentally, that was a \$178 million program. Guess what? Two hundred million dollars is what we're bringing in now, potentially, as the minimum. Really, it's like we're just picking numbers out of the sky now and hoping that this works for our seniors.

I believe, like many of my colleagues, that really we need to find the support for those seniors in the households. The fact is that reducing the already existing funding means that we're probably going to end up with less. I know that for my own parents, when I had told them that the Alberta government was going to consider bringing out a home equity line program, the only thing they could say was: "Scott, why would I ever let the government put a lien on my house? Why would I ever let the government do that?"

3:30

Even if they needed that \$40,000, they're going to be too terrified to allow our government to put a lien on it. Again, in the end, potentially, this has the ability to flop just like our wonderful jobs program. This could have been identified if you'd just sent this to the standing committee, which – guess what? – you didn't do. In the end, we're rushing things through the House.

The fact is, too, that we need to be doing a better job here because we continually put legislation through just too fast, and when it's time to actually do our job, it's hard to do it because it's too compressed a schedule. We get this legislation, and a week later it's implemented. That's just not enough time. By the time the opposition, all the opposition parties, have time to actually get through that bill, we've got three other bills right on its back. That tells me that, in the end, we're rushing things through. The government needs to slow down. In this case it especially needs to slow down when it comes to our seniors because if we get this wrong, our elderly pay for it, and that is your fault.

Now, I ask you to reconsider. I am asking you to send this to a standing committee. This is something that we cannot afford to get wrong.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak against Bill 5. Now, I'm not here to speak against the title of Bill 5 or the intent of Bill 5. I believe that Bill 5 is a very well-intentioned bill, trying to address a real problem and address a real social need, that lower and sometimes even medium-income seniors who own their homes sometimes have difficulty turning the capital asset of their home into cash to make renovations or do whatever they need to do. That is a real issue that the government is nobly trying to address. But the road to hell is paved with good intentions. The bill here is trying to address a real social need, to allow seniors to access the capital in their own homes to improve that property. Well, if we were just passing a bill of intent, if that was essentially a motion, I would support it. The problem is how the government goes about it.

Governments can do some things well and other things horribly. Governments can set broad policies and goals. They can set direction, strategic direction. Governments are almost always bad at specifically doing. That's why the minister doesn't personally manage doctors on the floor of the operating room. That is why the Minister of Justice doesn't personally manage cases of Crown prosecutors, the minister of social services does not direct the casework of social workers. It's the idea, the broad principle that government can set the direction, the goals of a department, but it

should never be specifically directing the implementation of those policies. That is for experts to do.

The government is proposing here to create what amounts to a second government-owned bank in the province. The government is proposing to create a financial exposure to the balance sheet of this province of just under \$6 billion if the eligible population were to take the government up to its maximum. That is a \$6 billion exposure for the people of Alberta, with an exposure based on our seniors. We're now going to put liens on seniors' homes, where the taxpayer is responsible and where the government comes collecting.

But it's not even going to be managed by people who know what they're talking about. We're not talking about putting this in the hands of ATB, who have bankers, who can do credit checks, who actually are familiar with how banking and lending work. We're talking about running this through a department. This is insane. This is absolutely insane, to say that the bureaucrats in a department are capable of intricate financial management on a case-by-case basis. Alberta Treasury Board itself would be almost swamped by a task of this magnitude. If Alberta Treasury Board was responsible for administering this, Alberta Treasury Board would have to hire scores of new employees to manage this. It is ATB which is mostly independent and has experts in it who know what they're doing.

The same cannot be said of government department bureaucrats. Bureaucrats are meant to administer a program. Bureaucrats are meant to carry out the policy directions of the minister. They are not qualified to approve people for loans where their houses are on the line. This is grossly irresponsible in the name of trying to accomplish a positive social outcome, allowing seniors to access the capital in their homes.

I would propose to the minister that she should think about this and send this to a committee where we can hear from financial experts. Let's hear from Alberta Treasury Branches. Let's hear from other banks and credit unions in this province. If the minister was serious about properly administering a program for seniors to access the capital in their homes, they would alter the mandate of Alberta Treasury Branches. They would give Alberta Treasury Branches a political mandate to provide loans to seniors to access the capital in their homes if they're not able to obtain that capital through the private lending markets. They would allow the Alberta Treasury Branches to do this, experts who know what they're doing, who know how to manage risk, who are not going to make loans to people who might not be credit worthy, who might overleverage, who might not know how to conduct complicated financial matters.

We're talking about handing it to bureaucrats. This is grossly irresponsible. Now, I know that the minister is trying to accomplish something positive here. This is an act with a very good name, an act whose intentions I support and, I would chance to say, probably all members of the House support. But the mechanics of this bill are grossly irresponsible.

This will expose us to a potential subprime mortgage crisis in this province. We're talking about a \$6 billion exposure to the taxpayer. We're talking about a \$6 billion exposure, with loans made by people who don't know what they're doing; a \$6 billion exposure made from a department, not an arm's-length agency; a \$6 billion exposure from bureaucrats with a political mandate, not experts in the banking industry. We have to have people administer a program like this who know what they're doing, people who have experience making loans, people who have experience doing credit checks, understanding the creditworthiness of customers.

Are we saying that absolutely anybody can access this regardless of their past credit history? Is this now a true loan with risk management, or is this an entitlement program which anybody

whatsoever can access even if they have a poor credit history? Well, those are very, very serious questions that need to be answered before we pass a bill that could expose the province's balance sheet to a liability of up to \$6 billion. This is not a casual bill, members. This is a very serious bill that will have serious implications.

3:40

Now, this won't create a crisis overnight. This will set in over time. It'll probably be after the next election before the chickens come home to roost on this one. But if we are talking about a program where anyone can obtain a loan regardless of their history and the program is administered by bureaucrats without a proper financial background, who don't have the experience making loans, who don't know what the broader picture is going to be, as a bank does with its own balance sheets and lending ratios, we are setting ourselves up for a boondoggle here.

This is the problem with too many politicians. We get elected to play with other people's money like it was a casual toy. We are talking about passing a bill here with massive financial repercussions for this province, for the seniors we're proposing to lend money to, and also for the taxpayers, who will backstop this program. People want us to act responsibly with their money, and pushing a bill through here without even going to a proper committee to hear a single expert witness is being irresponsible with people's money. It is being irresponsible with seniors' money. It is being irresponsible with taxpayers' money. It is being irresponsible with the money of future taxpayers, who will be on the line to pay the unfunded liabilities of this if these loans end up going sour.

How many people here feel qualified to determine if someone is credit worthy? Who here? Not a single member of this Legislature is qualified to do a credit check on anybody. Not a single member of this Legislature has any qualification as to who should and who should not get loans and in what amount. This is not a lending program. This is a boondoggle in the making, Madam Chair. And, unfortunately, the best we're going to be able to do is say, "I told you so," when in four, five, 10 years we've got a balance sheet problem on our books because loans were not properly made. They were made by bureaucrats. They weren't made by financial experts.

We should at the very least ask people who know what they're doing at the Alberta Treasury Branches to come to a committee of this Legislature and testify as to who is best positioned to administer a program of this scale. Let's talk to economists. Let's talk to lenders, bankers, credit unions. Perhaps a better program would be to guarantee loans in the private sector, for private-sector banks and credit unions to make these loans rather than the government itself. I don't know. There are many different ways we can achieve this social outcome that the minister is trying to get to. Again, the minister's goals here are very noble and well intentioned and I think would enjoy the support of most members of this Legislature, but the way she's trying to do it is hugely irresponsible.

I don't want to just sit here and warn the minister and then six years from now have to say: I told you so. The minister should be here for the entire debate. The minister should answer questions from members of the opposition as to the administration of this program. This is not a casual bill to sweep through the House because it has a nice name. This is a serious bill, and the minister should answer serious questions about it, and she should answer as to how they will administer a bill that will expose the people of this province to a \$6 billion liability without a single proper expert in place to administer it.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to table an amendment to Bill 5. If I may speak a little bit as they pass this out, Madam Chair. This government doesn't seem to demonstrate that they understand how to consult prior to drafting a bill, but they have said that they will consult after the bills have been drafted. This amendment that I'm going to be providing to this government is to simply review certain sections of this bill in order to measure, to identify concerns, and to identify issues and problems within one year. These are standard things that people do when they create new rules and new regulations, especially when they affect so many and especially when it can fiscally impair this province.

With that, I now give the requisite number of copies of my second amendment, and I'll read it into the record as the pages distribute it. I move that Bill 5, Seniors' Home Adaptation and Repair Act, be amended by adding the following after section 12:

13 A committee of the Legislative Assembly must begin a comprehensive review of the operations of sections 2, 5, 7, 9 and 11 within one year of the coming into force of these sections and must submit to the Legislative Assembly, within 6 months after beginning the review, a report that includes any recommendations for amendments to these sections by the committee.

Madam Chair, this amendment will require a review in one year, tabled by the committee in the Assembly, on the sections 2, 5, 7, 9, and 11. Section 2 is loans, 5 is grants, 7 is the right to cancel certain contracts, 9 is the effect of contract cancellation and responsibility of supplier, and 11 is regulations.

Madam Chair, it is absolutely critical that this legislation be reviewed properly to ensure that this major government program is operating in a way which is in the best interests of our seniors and of those who work to support them. I ask that the members would support this amendment to add this safeguard to Bill 5, to review and evaluate it as time goes on. This is a responsible, decent amendment. It would demonstrate from this government that they are truly providing some diligence in their haphazard development of their bills.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes. I rise to speak against the amendment. I appreciate the hon. member's intent in bringing forward this amendment. I believe that what he's intending to do by that is to confirm that the government has ongoing oversight of this bill, and I certainly agree with that. It's a necessity for any government to, in an ongoing way, consider the effects and implementation of legislation, no matter what it happens to be.

That's exactly what we will do as a government with this piece of legislation and any legislation that we pass in this House. We will always have an ongoing monitoring of legislation. If indeed there seems to be a difficulty with functioning or outcomes, then we'll as a government take stock of those and take action to amend difficulties that may arise. But we do have full confidence in this legislation, that it will very positively affect the targeted seniors who live in their homes right now but may not have the savings to effect repairs and alterations to allow them to live in those homes longer. Therefore, I don't believe this amendment is necessary, and I would urge its defeat.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak this afternoon to the amendment of what we have reiterated over and over is an important piece of legislation. Obviously, the intent of this legislation is to ensure that seniors get the care that they need and the ability to stay in their home wherever possible.

3:50

What we had attempted to do this afternoon was to provide some additional checks and balances when it comes to this legislation and the need to review the legislation. While I can certainly appreciate the Member for Edmonton-McClung's comments about the government's commitment to review the effectiveness of a program, there are a number of questions that the opposition has raised that remain unanswered or cause significant concern, particularly for some members in the community of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, around this piece of legislation. Again, they certainly support the intention of a government that is respectful of our seniors but want to ensure that the program that's initiated actually is going to be a program that does that.

This amendment requires a review. The government chose not to send the bill to committee yesterday, which would have provided that review up front and would have provided some additional analysis to all members of the Assembly. That committee was going to need to report back before the end of May, so it wasn't like we had a reason or a desire to delay the bill. I know that the government is committed to getting the sweeping regulations in place by the 1st of July. That in itself is going to be a significant amount of work because so much of this bill is going to be in those regulations. This amendment here provides an opportunity in the future to review the legislation in committee, to see if it's going well.

The Member for Edmonton-McClung said that they promise to review it, but this House, this Chamber, the Assembly is larger than the government. I know that the government thinks they have all of the right answers all of the time and that they are going to continue to be right. The government has made a number of missteps, on some of which, as the Minister of Economic Development and Trade says, they've pivoted and gone in another direction, and hopefully that is going to be a better result for the province of Alberta. But one of the reasons why they've pivoted on those things is because issues or concerns have been highlighted by the Official Opposition. The Official Opposition, on a number of files, has done a good job of engaging Albertans to ensure that they are aware and familiar with what is happening here in the Assembly and, as a result, have spoken up and informed the government about some of those concerns.

So the government has pivoted, and this amendment requires the government to consider whether or not they need to pivot. It's not an amendment that would repeal the whole bill, although some in the Assembly would suggest that that might not be terrible. It's not an amendment that requires undue or uncalled-for red tape but that a committee of the Assembly provide a comprehensive review. These are the very sorts of things that we as members of this Assembly are here to do.

Just today in question period the hon. Minister of Justice tabled a list of legislation that has not been proclaimed. One begins to wonder how it's possible that legislation was passed through the Chamber but never actually became law or wasn't ever proclaimed at the time by Her Excellency or His Excellency, as the case may be. Some of that legislation is quite old. Sometimes that can happen when the Assembly introduces legislation that, as they find out during the consultation process, that should have been done before, that's happening after, has all sorts of different consequences or things they did not realize, so the legislation doesn't wind up being

proclaimed in the end. These are all examples of when governments haven't been a hundred per cent correct.

What this amendment does – in a number of sections, including section 2, which discusses the loan; section 5 in the legislation, which discusses issues around the grant; section 7, which discusses issues around the right to cancel certain contracts; section 9, the effect of the contract cancellation and responsibility of suppliers; and a number of these sorts of things, it would have been very helpful if these would have been dealt with prior, particularly when it comes to contractors and suppliers and their ability to provide feedback into the legislation, into a very robust conversation around this piece of legislation.

Then, again, section 11, which has to do with the regulations: one of the reasons why that committee ought to review section 11 is because so much of this bill is going to be done in the confines of the minister's office. I know, as the representative of the good people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, that they didn't ask me to come and provide sweeping powers to the cabinet but to do everything I could to ensure that the Assembly, the Legislature, the voice of the people are able to have input and feedback in as many areas of government as possible. When we consolidate power in the minister's office, the openness and the transparency of the government can come into question. We've seen that in other decisions that the government has been making. What used to be third-party, independent bodies are being brought into the confines of government, and the power and decision-making are being consolidated. That's one of the things that regulations do.

What this amendment provides is a real opportunity for a comprehensive review of the legislation and the regulations that this government is going to put into place with little to no consultation with the stakeholders. It allows us the opportunity to shine light onto whatever those regulations may or may not be in the future. So it is my strong recommendation that members of this Assembly support such a valuable amendment. If the program is going off the rails, light can be shed. If seniors are being taken advantage of, if there are contractors that aren't doing the right thing – unscrupulous, I think, is what I was heading towards there – then we will have the opportunity to review the legislation and have a robust discussion and make sure that this legislation is what's right for the province. More importantly than that, we can ensure that this legislation is what is right for our seniors because we've heard lots of concern and discussion from this side of the House about some of the potential risks. This would be an opportunity for us all to address some of those risks.

With that, Madam Chair, I'm happy to take my seat and encourage all members of the Assembly to support the amendment.

4:00

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak on amendment A3? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to my colleague's amendment requiring that a review be tabled once a year for Bill 5. You know, multiple times in this House we've heard members from across the way speak about how important it is to get it right. Albertans have been offered assurances over and over again that the government has their best interests at heart. Often, however, those assurances have fallen a little flat in the aftermath when it is discovered that there is not quite as much consultation as has been promised or has been claimed. Well, I believe all the members of this House can also attest to the fact that we have offered repeatedly to help the government get it right, and, yes, that's what we're doing here today, trying to help get this right.

Just recently the Member for Edmonton-McClung claimed we were intent on installing a practice in this House of referring pretty much every motion we can to committee. There's a reason for that. Often while in opposition the government also attempted to refer to committees. Often they accused the government of ramming through legislation. Often they accused the government of lack of consultation. We're all aware of how the vote went on our referral motion. We are, after all, still here debating.

At this point, however, I'm now going to the bones of this amendment. We're saying: "Okay; you're confident that this legislation is air tight. You're positive there's nothing that could go sideways, nothing that could go haywire, upside down on this particular bill. You're adamant that you've consulted extensively with stakeholders and individuals, and you're going to move forward come hell or high water." Okay. We get it. We understand that.

Now what we're suggesting – and it's a little thing, really, but a vitally important thing for good governance – is that the government task the legislative committee to review it once it's been rolled out. I don't understand what the harm could possibly be in that. Let's consider how such a review could play out. I'll give you three scenarios here.

Scenario 1: it's a success. Look, I'm even giving you the benefit of the doubt here. The committee reports back in a year, give or take a couple of months probably, and reports to the Assembly that everything is running remarkably well. The response has been great. The rollout goes smoothly. It's a complete success. In that event, everybody in the House is happy. Members opposite may gloat. We may applaud the government, pat them on the back, on its good work.

Scenario 2 is a bit of a hit and miss. Aspects have been rolled out that have gone smoothly while there have also been some bumps in the road. The committee reports back to the House and is able to relook at the legislation in order to improve it, to ensure it hits all the right points. We may have heard comments throughout that period, over the period of a year, that would tweak us to think that we could possibly make some changes to this bill that would improve it. What could possibly be wrong with that?

Scenario 3. Let's just say that it's a flop. I was giving the government the benefit of the doubt here a moment ago, so now I have to take it away to be fair. I won't go so far as to say that it's an epic fail, but it might be close. There's confusion, discontent. It's not properly utilized. Potentially the savings aren't there. Also, potentially it's a mess, with administration costs running away.

In any one of these three scenarios the committee reports to the Assembly, and a decision is made as to where to go from there. There are a few members opposite who know what I'm talking about because that's what happened with the previous government, and those same members before May 5, 2015, were quick to point out how they had warned and cautioned but that the government had done its own thing without listening first, which resulted in legislation having to be revised and repealed.

Contrary to popular belief, my colleagues and I are not trying to be difficult, believe it or not, and as I said earlier – we've said it, and you've heard it before – we're trying to help. We're trying to inject a bit of common sense into the process of all legislation that comes through this House. It's not unheard of. Federally bills are sent to committee all the time. This is part of the process, or at least it should be, and it would certainly be nice if it was part of the process of the Alberta Legislative Assembly.

Madam Chair, I'd like to share an analogy to make this clearer. When a person lands a new job, they're often put on probation for

three to six months. The point of that probation is to ensure that things are working out, that the employee is settling into the role, learning the ropes, putting in the effort. At that point the employer gets a better idea of how good a fit the new hire is in the team and as part of the company. At the end of that time there is a review that happens, where everything is laid on the table, and employment decisions can be made for the future of the company. Why apply a different standard to legislation? If there's nothing to worry about, why be nervous about a review? The legislation will already be in place. It's simply a means of seeing and learning how things are working out. Furthermore, an in-depth review of legislation by members of this House could provide opportunities for better knowledge and understanding when crafting the next piece of legislation.

Let's not forget that this program is brand new. There is no similar program anywhere in Canada. It could well be that our sister provinces are looking at us to see how this works, how it goes, so let's show them. Let's use a formal review to get formal results that can be shared. As we've heard often from the members opposite, that's just good governance.

Madam Chair, I urge all members of this House to consider the benefits of this amendment, not only to improve this bill but for the benefit of good legislative practice in general, and to vote in favour, as I will be doing.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:08 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Schneider
Anderson, W.	Jansen	Smith
Cooper	MacIntyre	Starke
Cyr	Pitt	Strankman
Ellis	Rodney	Yao
Gill		

Against the motion:

Bilous	Goehring	McPherson
Carlier	Gray	Miller
Carson	Hinkley	Miranda
Ceci	Horne	Nielsen
Connolly	Kazim	Piquette
Coolahan	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Rosendahl
Dach	Littlewood	Sabir
Dang	Loyola	Schmidt
Drever	Luff	Schreiner
Eggen	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	Turner
Ganley		

Totals: For – 16 Against – 40

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

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

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 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.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: 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-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill: Bill 5. 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

Bill 5

Seniors' Home Adaptation and Repair Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister of seniors.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and move third reading of Bill 5, the Seniors' Home Adaptation and Repair Act.

I want to thank my colleagues on both sides of this House for raising important issues for a good debate on this valuable legislation. I want to thank my colleague the Member for Edmonton-McClung for his support and commitment to this bill and his hard work during this debate. The principle of this bill, Madam Speaker, as I have said before and as the Member for Edmonton-McClung has said during this debate, is our belief that many seniors simply wish to remain at home. I know there is broad support for the worthy principle that is underpinning this legislation.

I wholeheartedly agree with another colleague, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who said during this debate that one of our prime responsibilities as legislators is to look after vulnerable seniors. The member, who is also a physician, talked during the debate about his years treating elderly patients who have suffered strokes or heart attacks or are battling cancer. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud said that many of these patients may spend long periods of time in hospital because their homes are not equipped for their current needs. Their homes need the repairs or adaptations that they will be able to get under this bill.

This bill helps our health system and our seniors, and it benefits our communities. Seniors are valued members of the community, and we want them to be able to stay at home and age in their communities. Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for sharing his understanding and giving us the benefit of his years of experience treating patients. This helps us to better understand that for seniors and for all of us home means independence, an increased sense of well-being, and greater quality of life.

4:30

This, of course, is not just about seniors who are sick or recovering from illness. Many seniors deal with the diminished physical capacity which is a result of aging. In those cases it would be tragic if a senior had to leave their home because a hallway to the bedroom was too narrow or because they couldn't afford to install a walk-in tub, but this is the situation many seniors face. To remain in their homes, they need to make repairs or adaptations.

One specific example of a senior needing home repair was a senior with thick shag carpet along the hallway. That shag carpet is difficult to navigate with a walker. A smooth flooring surface would make all the difference to this senior being able to navigate the hallway many times a day. Another senior is scared of falling as he carries a laundry hamper down a flight of stairs to the basement. The solution is simple: move the washer and dryer to the main floor for easy accessibility. It is these kinds of adaptations that can make the difference between staying at home and needing new accommodations. These are the kinds of projects that we will fund through the low-interest home equity loan proposed under this legislation.

A HomeEquity Bank and Ipsos research study in the news today surveyed 300 Canadian homeowners who said that they want to remain at home as they age. About 58 per cent of the respondents said that improvements to their homes would be necessary; 44 per cent said that they would need to make improvements to their kitchens or bathrooms to improve accessibility. The new program will also increase the options currently available for any reasonable repair or adaptation that assists the senior who chooses to remain in their home. Proposed adaptations or repairs that increase safety, mobility, independence, and health for seniors will be eligible.

The loan amount of \$40,000 will cover the costs of most needed repairs or adaptations and strike a good balance between access to financial assistance and ensuring homeowners retain sufficient equity to repay the loan. For many seniors another monthly payment is not an option given fixed incomes and pensions. We will charge simple rather than compound interest against the loan, which will allow seniors to maintain more equity in their homes than when using general market products. Seniors will be able to borrow up to \$40,000 without the burden of making monthly payments. The loan will be repaid upon the sale of the property or earlier if the senior chooses. The new program will include a grant component for low-income seniors who do not qualify for the loan.

We believe that many seniors will be interested in the program. Our projection is that as many as 145,000 senior households will be eligible.

We know that seniors need to be confident about the application process and entering into contracts for repairs or adaptations. As a colleague said, with the increasing use of fine print, some seniors may not be as financially literate as they once were or are not as confident about negotiating a financial arrangement. We want to protect these seniors. We have built consumer protection measures into this bill to ensure that seniors get the information they want and the protection they need. The application package will include the Service Alberta publication on consumer tips, home renovations. This publication provides important information about contracts

and best practices to select a supplier and about getting comparative quotes from more than one business.

The bill includes provisions to protect consumers, including the following. The loan program will consider the reasonableness of the cost to the individual for the home repair, renovation, or adaptation as part of the loan approval process. Contractors will be required to advise the consumer that the loan program is available to eligible individuals and to advise the consumer of their cancellation rights if they are not eligible for the loan, the effect of a contract cancellation, the responsibility of the contractor to refund any money paid if a contract is cancelled, details about how contracts may be cancelled, and how the consumer may notify the contractor.

As well, the bill details the consumer's cancellation rights. A consumer may cancel a contract with no penalties or costs if the consumer applies to the program within 45 days of entering into a contract and if the consumer is not eligible for that loan. The consumer can cancel a contract within 30 days of being notified that they are ineligible for the loan. The consumer may waive cancellation rights, and the consumer removes cancellation rights if the consumer accepts delivery of goods or services outlined in the contract.

Albertans will have access to application forms and the information they need prior to the launch of the program on July 1. We will have staff ready to assist seniors and answer questions as we enact this new home repair/adaptation loan program. This program is an investment in our economy. It will spur economic activity for contractors, skilled workers, and suppliers. In our current difficult economic climate we will be saving \$6 million while still supporting low-income seniors through the grant component of the new program.

Finally, this is, of course, a voluntary program. It will give seniors another option to make the repairs and improvements they need. Whether it's ripping out the shag carpet or moving the appliances upstairs, this program is designed to support seniors to remain in their communities. This bill supports Alberta seniors and addresses the needs of an aging population. As my colleague said, we are fulfilling our responsibility as legislators to help the most vulnerable segments of our population, and I thank all my colleagues for their support.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Airdrie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, it's fairly obvious that there are some members in this House that aren't willing to listen to reasoned debate and amendments, but have no fear; I have some information here. I think it's very important for us to have an overview of what the rest of Canada is doing in regard to the situation of providing seniors with assistance to stay in their homes longer, which I really do think is very important. I think there's obviously, you know, cause for the concern that we've highlighted here today. The government being in the business of banking should definitely cause us to pause and to think and to really, really bring in the experts to debate this, and I would still encourage you to do that.

Anyway, I'd just like to point out, as we go through, what other provinces are doing, that I've pulled up through my research here. This is certainly not an endorsement of any of their projects, but I would like to point out that no other province or territory in Canada has actually gotten into the business of being the lender.

British Columbia has a program called home adaptations for independence, HAFI. It provides financial assistance to eligible low-income seniors and people with disabilities to live in the

comfort of their own homes. Renters and landlords can receive up to \$20,000 per home in the form of a forgivable loan. There's no age requirement for this, but you or a member of your household must have a permanent disability or diminished ability. The adaptation is for your primary residence, and it includes limitations such as that your household assets are less than \$100,000. These include your cash or bank balance, stocks, bonds, term deposits, mutual funds, business equity, land, real estate, or property holdings. These exclude RRSPs, RESPs, RDSPs, RRIFs, vehicles, and the home that you live in if you own it. It sets forth that the household income is within the housing income limit for your area, which also takes into account the household composition.

They also have a home renovation tax credit for seniors and persons with disabilities. It assists eligible individuals 65 and over and persons with disabilities with the cost of certain permanent home renovations to improve accessibility or to be more functional or mobile at home. This is maybe a little bit more similar to Alberta's RAMP program, which has been providing accessible upgrades here in Alberta in the form of a grant.

Now, Saskatchewan has the homeowner repair program. It provides financial assistance to help low-income homeowners make major repairs to their homes to meet the minimum health and safety standards. Eligible homeowners may receive up to \$23,000, and the program is for all persons, seniors and otherwise.

4:40

Some highlights here. You must own and occupy the home as your primary residence, the household income and asset levels are at or below the established limits as determined by the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, the repairs address health and safety needs, the repairs will extend the useful life of the property by 15 years, and the property is substandard or deficient and requires major repairs to at least one of the following areas: structural, electrical, plumbing, heating systems, or fire safety.

Another program that Saskatchewan has is the adaptation for independence program, AIP. It provides financial assistance to low-income homeowners or rental property owners to make a home more accessible for a person with a housing-related disability. Eligible homeowners and rental property owners may receive a forgivable loan of up to \$23,000. It's available to rental property owners and homeowners if they rent the modified units to low-income households that include a person with a housing-related disability and maintain affordable rents based on Saskatchewan Housing Corporation's rent schedule for the term of the loan.

Manitoba has the Manitoba emergency repair program for homeowners. Homeowners with low incomes may be eligible for financial assistance for emergency repairs to their homes. Key facts: you're eligible if the house is in need of major repair, it's your primary residence, and it's located in Manitoba outside of First Nations communities.

There's also the homeowner renovation assistance program. Homeowners with low incomes may be eligible for financial assistance to repair or restore their home to a minimum level of health and safety. Up to \$20,000 for eligible repairs may be available to qualified homeowners. If your home is located in a northern or remote community, you get a little bit more, up to \$23,000 to qualified homeowners. Now, you're eligible if your house is in need of major repair, it's your primary residence, you're located in Manitoba outside of First Nations communities, the house is at least five years old, it's assessed at a value no higher than the current program limit, and your total gross household income is at or below the income set by Manitoba Housing for your community.

Ontario has the Ontario senior homeowners' property tax grant. This grant helps seniors with the cost of their property taxes. Those eligible could get up to \$500 each year. Key requirements of this: you or your spouse or your common-law partner paid Ontario property taxes in the previous year, you meet the income requirements, as of December 31 of the previous year you're 65 years of age or older, you're resident in Ontario, and you own or occupy your principal residence.

Quebec has the residential adaptation assistance program. Persons with a disability where everyday activities in the home are limited may be eligible for the residential adaptation assistance program. The program grants financial assistance to homeowners for eligible work to adapt a dwelling to meet the disabled person's needs. The work must provide simple and economical solutions. The financial assistance is paid in the form of a grant, up to \$16,000 per eligible person. In specific cases the Société d'habitation du Québec – I'm not great at French – may pay additional financial assistance up to \$7,000 in cases . . .

An Hon. Member: Housing society.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you. Housing society.

. . . requiring specialized equipment. Additional assistance not exceeding \$10,000 may also be paid based on certain criteria as set by the Quebec housing society. Key facts: you must reside in Quebec outside of a native reserve, and you must provide a report by an occupational therapist demonstrating that their impairment is significant and persistent and requires alterations to their home.

In Newfoundland and Labrador they have the provincial home repair program. It's designed to provide funding to assist homeowners with low income who require repairs to their homes to bring dwellings up to the minimum fire and life safety standards with improvements in basic heating, electrical, and plumbing services and for applicants who require accessibility changes. Funding is limited to the costs associated with repairs. The forgivable loan funding is available for homeowners up to a maximum of \$5,000, \$6,500 in Labrador, and for persons with accessibility needs, \$7,500 in both Newfoundland and Labrador. Repairs exceeding these levels may be addressed under a repayable loan of up to \$12,500 or \$15,000 in Labrador. Key facts here: homeowners with low income, a household income of less than \$33,000, who require repairs to their dwelling. There's a lifetime assistance cap at \$12,500, and an application for a second project can be submitted after seven years have passed.

New Brunswick's federal-provincial repair program for homeowners in need of major repair or disabled accessible modifications assistance is in the form of a loan, a portion of which may not have to be repaid. The maximum forgivable loan for a housing unit is \$10,000 for regular repairs and \$10,000 for disabled accessible items. The amount of a forgivable loan is based upon a sliding income scale and the amount of required repairs. The loan amount is at the provincial borrowing interest rate and can be repaid over a period of 15 years.

One of the things that's interesting, Madam Speaker, about the current legislation that's being put forward – at least, it hasn't been made clear that there is any sort of requirement to actually submit the work to the program to receive the funding. This one actually addresses that.

In addition to that program in New Brunswick, households may be eligible for a forgivable loan for both disabled accessible modifications and other major repair items, structural and electrical, to a maximum of \$20,000. Seniors are eligible for a forgivable loan for minor adaptations to facilitate independent living to a maximum of \$3,500. And landlords are eligible for a forgivable loan for

disabled modification to a maximum of \$10,000. The eligibility in New Brunswick for this program: your household income must be below the established housing income limits, you must own the home and live in it, and you must require major repairs or lack basic facilities. Adaptations required for seniors must facilitate and prolong independent living.

Nova Scotia has a home adaptations for seniors' independence program. This program helps homeowners pay for home adaptations so that seniors with low incomes can stay in their homes independently for longer periods of time, and a one-time forgivable grant of up to \$3,500 is available. To be eligible for this program, you must be of age 65 years or older, experience difficulty with daily activities due to your age, have a low annual household income, and be a permanent resident of the home that will undergo repair or adaptation.

P.E.I. has a seniors' home repair program. The program provides assistance to low- and moderate-income seniors to make necessary repairs to one of the major components of the physical structure; for example, the roof, the furnace, windows, doors. This program is not meant for cosmetic repairs or renovations. The program will contribute 50 per cent of the cost of eligible repairs to a maximum of \$2,000. To be eligible for this program, repairs must be essential to the structure of the building as well as to health and safety, the applicant must be 60 years of age or older, and the combined income of the applicant and spouse must be less than \$35,000 per year.

So right across this country there are many programs that other provinces have put in place to help seniors age in their homes. They are very diverse in nature, certainly a lot different than the one that's being proposed here today. There's a mixture of grants, tax credits, and loans. Primarily, the format of dispensing is through the grants, which has worked well in the past. In all circumstances the provinces primarily use forms of forgivable loans with very loose terms such as maintaining that structure as your permanent residence for an average of between two to five years, depending on the province. All of the loans are placed against the individual and not the property. Repayment options vary by province. Quite simply, no other province is getting into the business of placing caveats against our seniors' homes.

4:50

I would like to emphasize that my colleagues and I fully support seniors staying in their homes. During the election process my mother sat me down with her friends and a teapot and asked for some assurances on how this province is going to assist them as they go on. [interjections] Many unique things. And I hope to always be invited for tea. My mother herself is not as able as I hoped she would be at the age that she is, so there are things that we're going to need to be putting in my parents' home to assist them in their daily lives. Fortunately, my parents have been good fiscal conservatives over the years and will likely not need to access a loan program or a grant program or any of those.

Making sure that our seniors can live in their homes and live better lives for longer is extremely, extremely important to myself and to the members in the Wildrose Party. The quality of care and services for our seniors is certainly a priority. While I'm sure that this bill was brought with good intentions – I truly do. There is certainly a lack of access to capital for seniors. Actually, low income or not, the fact of the matter is that a retired person over the age of 65 is not bringing in a whole ton of cash and therefore has a hard time accessing loans for anything, quite frankly. I do really recognize that that's an issue that we need to address.

Again, my caution is for the government stepping in and being the banker. There's got to be a different way to do this, and you'd have less resistance if we could address that issue.

Anyway, I do have some data here that's been collected as to what other provinces are doing, you know, what's working and what's not. I urge you to take that into consideration if you, perhaps, may not have your minds fully made up on pushing through this piece of legislation. It's just something to consider.

With everything that comes through this House, I think it's really important that we're passing good, solid legislation, that we're not doing an oops later – we all probably have larger-than-life egos in this House – and I understand that that's hard to do. So let's get it right this time. Let's really do good for the seniors in this province and for the jobs that we were elected to do here in this House.

Thank you for listening to me. I hope it wasn't too dry.

An Hon. Member: Never.

Mrs. Pitt: Never. I'm losing my voice if you're that interested.

Anyway, please take this into consideration. Again, there are quite a few concerns with this bill, but I think this is something that we can work towards changing, really making a good piece of legislation that works here in the province and is something we can all be proud of. Certainly, I can assure you that if this is really, truly a good bill, you guys are going to look just great, and everybody's going to love you. So just consider that.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand up in support of Bill 5, the Seniors' Home Adaptation and Repair Act. This is actually the first time during this debate that I am standing up.

As I've been listening to the debate over its various stages, like many people, I think of my grandparents. My grandparents on my mother's side are both alive and well and fairly deep into their 80s currently. I love them very much, as I'm sure you would imagine. I was thinking that many provisions of this bill are for them. As I was thinking of them as the debate went on, I feel that there are some very good parts of this bill as it would relate specifically to their situation. For example, my grandparents' house, which they have lived in since the early '50s, has a water softener in it, and recently that water softener had a catastrophic mechanical failure, and it needed to be replaced. Through the process of that, my grandparents were asking me about various salespeople that had come to their house to upgrade their water softener to a new, more energy-efficient unit or perhaps to fix their old one.

One of the provisions in the bill is about ensuring consumer protection measures to ensure that seniors know their rights when hiring contractors and cancelling their contracts. I think that's very important because, although my grandparents throughout their lives are still very sharp individuals in some ways, they don't have access to the Internet currently. They retired before personal computers were a thing. As a result, you know, they don't have access to online reviews such as the Better Business Bureau's. I do my best as a good grandson to help them out with that, but not all seniors may have family nearby to help with that. I'm thinking that that provision, in particular, about ensuring that seniors know their rights, would be very valuable to somebody in my grandparents' scenario.

Another thing is that when they speak of the home adaptations and renovations that this program would include, as I was listening to the hon. minister speak earlier, some of those my grandparents

have already had a chance to do in their house. A perfect example of that is moving the laundry machines from the basement up onto the main floor of their house. They jokingly refer to it as slowly decommissioning their basement. At their age going up and down stairs is a bit of a slow process, more so than it used to be. They've also done things like installing walk-in tubs so my grandparents can have showers without stepping over the edge of the bathtub to have a shower or a bath. There's another one here. This could apply for roof replacement, which I know is something that my grandparents are thinking about as well. As you can imagine, their house is now a solid 60 years old, so that's important.

Now, another part of it is that there was a quote that came from the Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton which basically says that research consistently shows that seniors prefer to age in their homes, so it is so critical that seniors are able to adapt and maintain their homes to meet their changing needs over time.

Madam Speaker, I couldn't agree more. I have this conversation with my grandparents all the time. My grandparents, like I said, are at a stage where they do need a little bit of help with their daily activities, and after looking at all the options, they decided that they wanted to continue to be a part of their community, the community that they've been a part of since that area of Calgary was first developed. They wanted to be with their friends. They wanted to go out and walk their dog. They wanted to be able to garden in their own backyard.

This program is to help those people like my grandparents do just that, which is why, Madam Speaker, I am going to be supporting this bill. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am, as always, honoured to rise, especially to speak about the Seniors' Home Adaptation and Repair Act. Again, I'd like to say that the intention of this bill is exactly what I think all of us would like to see happen, but the bill has the potential to be wide-reaching, with perhaps a great deal of unintended consequences for our seniors and the taxpayer.

Seniors have worked hard their whole lives. Understanding that, when they reach their golden years, their families and friends and, yes, their province should be there for them. Certainly, I think there's a desire on all sides of this House to ensure that we do right by our seniors and to ensure that all can enjoy a high quality of life, especially in their own homes wherever possible. But when you look at a risky economic experiment, that does not seem to be the best way to go about attaining those goals.

I agree with many members of the Assembly who have suggested that we explore the viability of having a market mechanism to achieve the same ends, our banks. We are particularly unique in this province, having ATB Financial. And our local credit unions need to be involved in the discussion around a program such as this. I think that the government is underestimating what a complicated venture this has the potential to become in proposing that a banking type of operation can be set up within the bureaucracy.

The notion of simple interest is good. No monthly payments until a person moves, sells, or passes away sounds great. But once we get into the territory of government registering caveats against a senior's home, it introduces a great deal of complexity and potentially very significant long-term consequences. It's not really hard to imagine the complications arising around estates once the time comes for ownership to be transferred. And I would really

hope that the government had considered how delays and bureaucratic wrangling could impact the executors of the will and the families of these seniors.

5:00

Meanwhile, on the other side, this bill could create potential for tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars of liability for the province of Alberta. We can't take that too lightly. Has the government given any consideration, Madam Speaker, to the need to build a whole other entire bureaucracy to administer this program? The minister says that it will be managed with existing resources. I would really, really appreciate having an explanation as to how that will work.

Aside from any unforeseen circumstances or complexities that this bill entails, I have some extremely serious concerns with the rollout of this legislation and the manner in which it has been presented in this House. There is much of this bill that remains to be seen, parts that have been buried in regulations, with the government asking us to trust them. This is not a good practice. Such core points of a bill of this magnitude have to be debated in the House, in the open. Madam Speaker, for example, it seems that the government will decide by regulation what repairs will qualify under the loan. What sorts of things will this entail, and what mechanism will the minister use to ensure that these requirements are being adhered to? This is a humongous responsibility.

Now, another part of this bill is the requirement to have work be approved by the minister and done in an approved manner. Again, this is massive. It seems to entail an even bigger, more complex government apparatus and bureaucracy. We need to understand how that's going to work. We're left without clarity on what would be approved, who would be approved to construct it, and what would constitute a reasonable project. We are assured that these, too, will come once the minister is given regulatory authority. Of course, the implication with such wide regulatory authority is also that whatever we are being promised today can just as easily be changed behind closed doors at any point down the road.

This is extremely well intentioned. All of us see that. We understand that. But the reality is that at a time when we can least afford it, I strongly encourage the government not to get caught passing a piece of legislation in a rushed or haphazard manner, not when it has the potential to add unforeseen costs and bureaucracy, that stand to worsen the growing problem of debt. More importantly, what we're all talking about here is dealing with seniors' care in housing. We owe it to them to do things right and to get it right the first time.

I strongly urge all members of this Assembly to vote against passing Bill 5 at this time. Let's take some time, let's bring some experts in, and let's talk about this and figure out what is best for our seniors. In my culture these are the gems of our society. These are the wisdom; these are the storytellers; these are the people that have impacted absolutely every aspect of my life personally and my children. The respect that is due to these people, the group of people that have built this province up, is much more than what is entailed in this bill. It's so much more. We owe that to them.

I urge every member of this Assembly to vote against this at this time. It may be that there are some interesting parts of this concept and there are aims that we all share, but it cannot proceed in its current format.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments?

Seeing none, I'll call on the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a remarkable opportunity to speak to Bill 5 in support of the seniors' home adaptation and repair program. During such variable economic circumstances it is important to look to the value-added strategies that recognize the balance between economic sustainability, fiscal responsibility, and strong, sound governance. I believe that Bill 5 embraces this delicate stability.

Bill 5, or SHARP as it is commonly referred to, will provide our seniors the element of independence by assessing the equity in their homes to make structural modifications that support the comforts of the home that they are so fond of. This, in turn, allows them the peace of mind that accompanies the quality of life they so rightfully deserve. Independent living provides continuum, and that is an important aspect to our seniors. Continuum provides the reassurance of safety, that is important to everyone. Continuum allows family to attend to family needs in the atmosphere that resonates, home.

The SHARP program not only echoes continuum; it is viable in that it does not require monthly repayment to sustain it as the equity exists within the home. Up to \$40,000 can be made available to provide our seniors with the safety mechanisms that ensure their well-being and their families the peace of mind that their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents enjoy the ultimate comfort they deserve.

Madam Speaker, sound governance echoes in this bill. I applaud our government for recognizing this opportunity as it addresses housing concerns for our seniors as wins on many levels. Recognizing consumer protection to mitigate the advantage of our seniors is strong accountability. Providing the essence of home safety and the independence of our seniors is a priority for the great work they have accomplished to make Alberta the great province it is and always will be.

This initiative provides work in these challenging times for our Albertans. SHARP provides a housing market for our seniors, with adaptations that already meet needs. The SHARP program is an innovative way to stimulate our economy through measures of opportunity. Madam Speaker, I think we can all agree that this bill incorporates the fiscal responsibility that Albertans are waiting for.

We need to recognize that Bill 5 incorporates many advantages that support value-added objectives and aims to resolve on many levels. Many of our seniors have equity as well as fierce independence. This initiative allows the continuum of their self-sufficiency while addressing the needs and priorities of this invaluable demographic. Bill 5 provides seniors the opportunity to access this value to improve their home as well as their quality of life. This provides greater opportunity than what is currently available under the special needs assistance program.

SHARP is an investment geared to increasing accessibility as well as ensuring the structural integrity of property. When we invest in infrastructure on any level, we are investing wisely. When we invest in Albertans, we are empowering Albertans. Madam Speaker, I am confident that the seniors' home adaptation and repair program will evolve to ensure we are speaking to Albertans' needs, maintaining the integrity of their essence, and building strong foundations for future generations. This program looks to almost triple the eligibility of households compared to the current special needs assistance program, and that defines value-added.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?
The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, it's with the greatest respect that I rise to question the Member for Red Deer-

North in this regard. We've had some great conversations before and hopefully will afterwards. I also mean the greatest respect to the fabric and the foundation of the seniors of our province. They are the backbone of our province.

But to the member. She made a comment about investing in infrastructure, and I was wondering if she could further explain how she feels that the government involvement, the government investment in homes – because ultimately these homes will have to have a letter of credit applied to them for the government to allow these developments – could more properly adjudicate this than, possibly, a government backstop to a private institution that could do the same thing.

5:10

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

Mrs. Schreiner: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the comment and question. The proposed seniors' home adaptation and repair program will allow seniors to use their home equity to make modifications to remain in their homes and maintain their independence. More seniors will be eligible to access further funds to do a much broader scope of work than what was already available under the special needs assistance program.

The proposed Seniors' Home Adaptation and Repair Act will include consumer protection measures to ensure seniors know their rights when hiring contractors and cancelling contracts. The seniors' home adaptation and repair program promotes effective and responsible governance. It is anticipated that the proposed program will save the government \$6 million annually.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 5, at this point in third reading. As it currently stands, there are far too many unanswered questions about Bill 5, the Seniors' Home Adaptation and Repair Act. It is, quite frankly, unacceptable for this or any other government to pass a bill which commits the government to a major financial lending scheme until we can actually see what the details of the program will be. We need details, we need facts, and we should have research done and reviews done before we get Alberta's taxpayers into the practice of providing home equity loans administered by a bureaucracy with no experience in doing so.

Madam Speaker, we would all be better served and better able to fully represent Alberta's seniors and our constituents if this bill had been sent to committee, where we could have heard from the experts in financial transactions, the contractors, the experts in renovations, and so on. We had a motion to refer it to committee, which would have allowed the government the time that is necessary to think about what the program will look like and come back to the House with actual concrete terms. Instead, we have this government that's going to push this bill through regardless of this lack of research and this lack of broad, province-wide consultation with the experts, including legal experts because there are going to be a number of legalities surrounding this.

Some Albertans are already reporting their concerns about this bill in the media. Simply, people are somewhat confused on whether or not this is a reverse mortgage. Some have asked that question. Is this a home equity loan? Some are familiar with that instrument at their banks. Some are raising concerns that the government will be getting into – we even heard this – predatory

loan practices with our seniors. I mean, people are confused. They want answers to this. The committee process would have provided that kind of a forum where Albertans could have been more fully informed and have input into the finer details of this act.

While I am absolutely certain that it is not the case that the government is getting into something predatory, it's the type of problem that occurs when a lack of detail in legislation happens. One person said that she's afraid this will mean seniors will lose valuable equity in their home and face more difficult choices down the road. This is true.

Madam Speaker, it is incumbent upon the minister and this government to explain these things and why these details are not ironed out as we develop this piece of legislation. Albertans are already worried and with good reason given this government's record with regard to trust and consultation. It should not be adding to their concerns again with an untested program heretofore unseen in our country without allowing for a thorough study of its potential ramifications. According to the minister's own briefings and comments, a program like this has never been attempted before in Canada, and the minister needs to stop letting a manifesto govern policy choices. This bill apparently may make a loan available to up to 145,000 households, or 260,000 seniors, according to the government's estimates, and those not eligible for the loan may be eligible for a grant. That is a lot of people depending on a lot of mays. They may be eligible for a grant; they may be eligible for the loan.

Madam Speaker, the eligibility and loan maximum in its extreme could lead to a whopping \$5 billion maximum liability for the government. It's an unbudgeted liability and an unknown and heretofore unbudgeted administration cost. There is no subscriber limitation put on this. Therefore, staffing levels are unknown. Debt levels are unknown. There are far too many unknowns here to be going down this road in such an irresponsible management manner. This is governing by guess or by golly. This is not really government as it should be. There ought to be a larger focus on ensuring that we get this right and that we're not rushing ahead on a very sensitive piece of legislation. We need to have proper research to use as the foundation for deciding our next steps forward for our seniors, so it's important that we take time to hear from Alberta's seniors.

Of all things that I have a problem with in this bill, it is that element right there, that it didn't go to committee. Seniors were not invited to come to this place and to talk to everyone and to ask all of the questions that they ask and make the suggestions that they have. This is the group of people that built this province, and they know a thing or two about what they need, and they know a thing or two about business and about home loans. They are the experience in this province. I am quite certain they could have provided significant amounts of input into this bill's development.

Madam Speaker, we took some time to reach out, and we heard from seniors, seniors' organizations, some banks, some contractors about this new program. These people are also going to be affected by this bill if it's passed, and the one thing we heard is that they really feel like they deserve to be consulted. How about that? Bill 6 all over. This loan program, as of yet untested in Canada – we heard from my esteemed colleague about some of the other programs similar to this in other parts of the country, and if we're going to veer so far off the beaten path, we do really need more information about the potential consequences of a program like this. We need the minister and we need the government to give some reasonable responses to some of these issues.

Just like all Albertans, seniors are worried about their futures and the future of this province, and their families are worried as well. They're worried about legislation that hasn't been fully thought

through, that could impact their future, the future of their children, their grandchildren, the future of the asset value, the value of their home, and on issues like these, in a matter of such importance, Wildrose believes that an efficient and compassionate government should be focusing on the most vulnerable in a very well thought through manner, and we just don't see that.

The government says that they think that there will be around 5,000 loans, I believe one of the other hon. members suggested. I understand that this is an estimate. The press release says that over 140,000 homes could qualify. This is a significant amount of money. As my colleagues have mentioned previously, it seems unlikely that the department is going to be able to administer this without adding increased staff, but we don't know because we don't know how many. There's no limit on the subscription to this. Given the stated goal of monitoring costs of these projects and the cost of administration and the cost of these loans, these are all great big unknowns, far too many expensive unknowns.

5:20

My colleagues asked for this bill to go to committee so that more of these details could be worked out. The government is not interested in doing that consistently. Madam Speaker, as my colleagues have clearly articulated, we do not believe government should be in the business of business. We just have too many questions at this point about the details to be supportive of this bill. So I encourage all hon. members that – unless this government is prepared to do some very serious research into this and allow for a more fulsome exploration of this bill, I cannot support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to finally get an opportunity to speak to Bill 5. I'm rising here to support Bill 5. I have over the past couple of days listened to the debates on both sides. You know, it's interesting. There are compelling points made on both sides of this argument. I've come down to the decision to support the bill on the principle that it is an opportunity to help seniors and one, I think, that we should take advantage of. It may not be perfect. I have many questions, as my hon. colleagues have raised those questions, but those questions do not concern me to the point where I would vote against it.

There are many other ways that seniors need help, one of those, of course, being help with daily living. This, of course, will not address those issues of income gaps or accessibility outside the home, those sorts of things, but it does address one of the very many important aspects of keeping seniors in their homes as long as possible and allowing people to age in place on their own terms, using their own equity and their own money. To me, it seems like a great example of a cost-effective program, allowing people to use the equity built up in their homes. Yes, there is some government expense to taxpayers, but it's minimal, and I have no grand concerns. The cost to administer that program, I think, is one that I do worry about. That's been spoken about at length by several people, hon. colleagues, in the House.

The regulations themselves are unclear. We have guidelines or indications from the minister about what those regulations will be, especially as they relate to asset limits. I have yet to hear a hard asset limit. If there has been one discussed, I haven't heard it, which doesn't mean it hasn't been discussed; it just means I haven't heard it. But what I would encourage the minister to do, if asset limits – of course, for seniors as well as many of us the most substantial asset we have is our house. A \$500,000 house in a small town in

Alberta is a very different thing than a \$500,000 house in Edmonton or Calgary, and that's something I would certainly hope that the minister takes into account. Then, also, I really encourage open communication as the regulations are developed, as the program is rolled out. I know, again, that that's been talked about, and I trust that the minister will in fact do that.

You know, my friends in the Wildrose opposition talked about several of the groups that they've consulted with – and I trust they have – who have concerns and questions about this. I know we perhaps didn't get off on the best foot earlier this afternoon, my friends in the Wildrose and I, but I hope you'll consider, you know, that the Alberta Real Estate Association does support this bill.

In summary, what I'll say about the bill is that although I have concerns – and I won't enumerate those concerns at great length here as we are short on time – the upside of the bill, the benefits of the bill outweigh the risks and outweigh the downside, and in this case, given the importance of aging in place, given the importance of allowing seniors to choose their own path, I think that I'll give the government the benefit of the doubt on this. So I would encourage all members, even with the concerns and hesitations, to support the bill. It has important aspects, and I would encourage everyone in this House to support the bill. Let's try and let's find out if, in fact, this can become an effective program for seniors in Alberta.

With that, Madam Speaker, I thank you for the time.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

Bill 6 Securities Amendment Act, 2016

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

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 6, the Securities Amendment Act, 2016.

On behalf of the Minister of Finance I would like to recap for members in this Chamber our government's approach to securities regulation as we have recently made our position quite clear. I would also take this opportunity to recap some of the key elements in this bill so that members are aware of the good work we are doing to carefully manage our capital markets right here in Alberta. Finally, I would like to briefly address some of the comments made yesterday during the excellent discussion on this bill.

As members of this Assembly know well, our government recently announced that we will continue to regulate our own capital markets right here in Alberta instead of joining the national securities regulator. We'll be sticking with the Alberta option, with our first-class provincial regulator, the Alberta Securities Commission. This decision was not taken lightly. We studied the issues carefully. We spoke with members of industry, with members of the financial sector, and, of course, with regulatory experts. After careful consideration we came to the conclusion that our unique capital markets, driven by the enormous needs of the resource sector, are best served by a street-level regulator. A regulator that knows the industry can provide local oversight right here in Alberta, not thousands of kilometres away on Bay Street.

This was the right decision. We are proud to be sticking with the Alberta option, and we are pleased that members of industry in Calgary and Edmonton and all across this province agree with us.

As our government moves forward with an Alberta-based regulator, I should also say a few words about the Alberta Securities

Commission. Recently, after a decade of noble service, Bill Rice retired as chair and CEO of the Alberta Securities Commission. He was a champion for Alberta, a first-rate regulator, and a leading voice on the national stage. Replacing Bill Rice was no small challenge.

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member.

Hon. members, can you please keep the conversations down or take them outside. Thank you.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, replacing Bill Rice was no small challenge; however, I'm so very pleased that our government met that challenge. The incoming chair of the Alberta Securities Commission, Stan Magidson, is a veteran lawyer and an accomplished securities expert, and he has deep roots right here in Alberta. Stan is an excellent choice to lead the ASC as our government ensures that we have a robust framework for capital formation while ensuring strong investor protection.

On that note, Madam Speaker, let me now say a few words about the very important piece of legislation, the Securities Amendment Act, 2016. This bill codifies our government's commitment to ensuring that our capital markets are well regulated and done so within the framework of a provincially led regulator. As members of this Assembly are well aware, the securities landscape is rapidly evolving. We all know that it is becoming more complex, sophisticated, and international in scope every year, and it is being driven by remarkable technological advances. In this context our government and all members of this House have a job to do. Our job is to ensure that our system of securities regulation keeps pace. We must keep pace with evolving international standards and global regulator reform initiatives, and we must make use of the best technical expertise that is available to us. That is what this government has done.

5:30

As part of this government's commitment to effective oversight we have been working with our partner regulators in other provinces to create a more harmonized regulatory framework across the country. It is our belief that this harmonization approach will create market efficiencies while still respecting our decision to continue with a provincially led regulator, the Alberta Securities Commission. To be clear, as our government seeks to amend this act and as we continue with an Alberta-led regulator, we are driven by three key goals. They are effective investor protection, strong market integrity, and maintaining an effective system of capital formation.

Now, let me recap for members some of the more important items in the bill. First, the bill will update definitions of a derivative, reporting issuer, and security in section 1 of the act. Updating the definition of derivative will allow the Securities Commission to regulate hybrid products, those with characteristics of a security and a derivative, more effectively and on a harmonized basis across the country. This change, while it might appear small, is crucially important to ensuring effective regulation of new financial products. Updating the reporting issuer definition will eliminate a gap in section 2 of the act as the current definition is not necessarily complete, and updating the definition of a security will ensure that a security that is prescribed by rule to be a derivative is not also captured in the definition of a security. Madam Speaker, these are common-sense reforms to the Securities Act. They are supported by the Alberta Securities Commission, regulators across the country, and I sincerely hope by all members in this House.

Second, Madam Speaker, amendments to section 29 and 42 of the act will allow our regulator to act more quickly when there is risk of potentially illegal activity. Currently the Alberta Securities Commission is required to follow the *Alberta Rules of Court* notice requirements before a witness can be summoned to appear before a hearing or an investigative interview. While these rules are appropriate for civil matters, the 20-day notice requirements are just too slow when it comes to the rapid nature of our capital markets. Therefore, the Alberta Securities Commission has proposed a shorter 10-day notice period, and our government agrees. This change to the act is just one illustration of this government's serious commitment to investor protection.

Third, Madam Speaker, this legislation will amend the wording of the halt-trade provision in section 33. The halt-trade order is a new tool, another illustration of this government's commitment to investor protection. The halt-trade order allows the Alberta Securities Commission to quickly and temporarily halt trading in our capital markets. It is a quick-action mechanism that allows the Alberta Securities Commission to intervene in the market if it sees potential illegal or problematic activity. While we don't anticipate that this provision will be used frequently, giving the Alberta Securities Commission the best possible tools to regulate our markets is just good governance, and industry agrees.

Fourthly, Madam Speaker, the act proposes an amendment to section 42, which will allow a justice of the peace to issue search warrants rather than a Court of Queen's Bench judge. This will allow the Alberta Securities Commission to move more quickly and free up the courts so they can deal with other pressing matters. Once again, this thoughtful and measured amendment to the act is another illustration of our government's commitment to ensuring investor protection.

Fifth, Madam Speaker, the act will update regulations related to exchanges, self-regulatory organizations, trade repositories, and clearing agencies. These updates will make the provisions more consistent and easier to understand and are part of this government's commitment to keeping securities regulation current.

Sixth, Madam Speaker, as part of this government's mission to harmonize regulatory provisions across the country through our work with the Canadian Securities Administrators, we are proposing changes to part 17 of the act related to civil liability provisions. These changes are supported by regulators across the country, the Alberta Securities Commission, and by stakeholders.

Finally, Madam Speaker, this act will make amendments to the Lieutenant Governor in Council's regulation-making powers to assist Canada in meeting its G-20 commitments relating to the use and trading of derivatives. This is an excellent example of how we can work with other regulators across the country to meet national and international standards while maintaining a provincially led regulator right here in Alberta.

As I wrap up my remarks, Madam Speaker, I should say that we are on the right track. While I appreciate that some members opposite wanted this bill to be referred to further study, amendments to the Securities Act shouldn't have to wait. For example, I doubt you could find serious expert testimony that would suggest it was a bad idea to introduce a halt-trade order provision. My point is that experts have weighed in, the Alberta Securities Commission has weighed in, and our government has listened carefully to experts and industry.

The amendments to this act are reasonable, straightforward, and simply good governance. They deserve the support of all members of this House. Even Thomson Reuters, in a summary undertaken by their regulatory intelligence unit, highlighted the obvious. We are giving the Alberta Securities Commission new enforcement

powers, and we are doing so reasonably. These reforms are important, Madam Speaker, as Thomson Reuters correctly points out that Alberta is the second largest capital market in the country, with roughly a third of all capital market activity. We simply have to get this right and continue to evolve as our capital markets evolve. I should add that this is commonplace, for us to amend the Securities Act. In fact, it is amended nearly every year.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I am proud that we are sticking with our provincial regulator in the Alberta Securities Commission, and I am also proud that we are taking practical, concrete steps to ensure that we have a first-class regulatory framework. Alberta is doing its part and more to ensure that we protect investors, and this government is ensuring that the Alberta spirit will continue to thrive with one of the world's most vibrant and efficient capital markets. It is in the interest of all Albertans that we adopt this bill.

I ask all members of this House to join me and support these critically important amendments to the Securities Act, and I would offer, Madam Speaker, that as our government continues with its thoughtful and measured approach to the governance of our capital markets, we are always ready to listen to good and new ideas. If members opposite have suggestions, we ask that they share them with us. We are willing to listen, and we will consider their ideas as we move into the future with an Alberta-led regulator.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and once again I ask for all members' support on this important bill.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to see the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is evolving to support capital markets as a principle.

I rise to speak to Bill 6, the Securities Amendment Act, 2016. The Wildrose recognizes the need for periodic administrative updates to legislation such as our Securities Act. We would have appreciated seeing the bill go to committee to ensure that members understand the legislation and to hear from the experts. It is important that the Alberta Securities Act provide a competitive advantage for our province while protecting our investors. This government has said that it will maintain Alberta's independent securities regulator, and the Wildrose caucus is very pleased to hear that.

At the same time we're also happy to see our securities rules harmonized with other provinces' where necessary. This is a positive step that will improve the interprovincial flow of capital. Harmonizing our securities rules with other provinces' while maintaining our independent control of our securities is important. Breaking down interprovincial trade barriers, whether we're engaging in commercial trade or trading in securities and derivatives, is sorely needed in this country.

This bill is a good example of what responsible government should do, one that legislates in response to market needs rather than trying to direct the market. I would hope that we see more legislation in that spirit.

5:40

We also appreciate that this bill streamlines the process for investigating shady trade deals. Specifically, amendments to sections 29 and 42 cut the 20-day waiting period in half so that there only needs to be a 10-day notice period before regulatory investigations can commence. Who here remembers Bernie Madoff? He wanted a few days to settle some accounts before the Ponzi scheme he was running collapsed. This reduction in days will

help ensure that Alberta-based Madoffs of the future will get investigated sooner, before they can do more damage to investors.

We've also seen that the amendment to section 33.2(4) updates language surrounding halt-trade orders, allowing for flexibility around how long such an order can remain in effect by making it equivalent to an interim order. By amending section 42 of the existing act, this bill will align our securities process with current criminal law by allowing a justice of the peace to issue a search warrant in the event that it is needed.

Most importantly, the changes this bill introduces respond to the confusion in market trading surrounding hybrid securities and derivatives products. The bill updates definitions of securities and derivatives in order to reflect the complexity of products in the market today. It makes it possible to have hybrid derivatives that are not designated or prescribed as derivatives. Likewise, it allows certain hybrid securities that are not designated or prescribed as securities.

It is often a bit nerve-racking to have to decide on a technical piece of legislation for a Legislature like this. Thankfully, we have experts like those at the Alberta Securities Commission to look into all of these market products and protect consumers. It is incumbent upon us to provide the Alberta Securities Commission with the tools necessary to do its job. At Committee of the Whole I outlined some of the changes that people in the industry would like to see made in order to protect and, thereby, encourage investors. Perhaps the minister would kindly answer some questions and take those suggestions and come back with those changes in the fall or spring when we next update this bill.

I will close with this, Madam Speaker. Oversight is increased by having a regulator blocks away, not miles away.

Albertans are the ones . . . with the best understanding of our industry. Given that our capital markets are defined by [our unique] resource sector, it only makes sense to have a provincially led securities regulator who understands our province's unique needs.

Those were the words of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance on April 6 in the *National Post*. For once I agree with him.

I ask my colleagues in all parties to support this bill. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 7 Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2016

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to speak about amendments to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. The proposed amendments in Bill 7 would authorize the early appointment of an Electoral Boundaries Commission on or before October 31, 2016, which is earlier than currently allowed under the act, and clarify the commission's authority to consider recent information respecting populations not collected on a province-wide basis such as municipal population information. This information would be used along with the federal

decennial census of population or more recent province-wide census.

As mentioned, the first proposed amendment would allow early appointment of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. The act's timelines for appointment of a commission are based on the assumption that general elections are held about every four years. The last election was held about a year earlier than anticipated. The current wording of the act provides that a commission will be "appointed during the first session of the Legislature following every 2nd general election after the appointment of the last Commission." However, if fewer than eight years have passed since the appointment of the last commission, the following commission is to be appointed "no sooner than 8 years" after that.

As the commission was last appointed in July 2009 and there have been two general elections since then, the earliest the commission could be appointed is eight years after that date. As such, with the current wording of the act a commission cannot be appointed earlier than July 2017 and must be appointed no later than July 2019. A commission needs to be appointed before July 2017 so that there is sufficient time for it to do its work, to make its recommendations to this House, and to allow candidates to prepare for the next election. It is anticipated that the next general election will be held between March 1 and May 31, 2019, as per the fixed election period set out in the Election Act. The Chief Electoral Officer recommends that the commission be appointed in the fall of 2016.

I will now explain why it's important to proceed with authorizing the early appointment of the commission from a legal perspective. The Charter right to vote includes a guarantee of effective representation. Currently Alberta has 87 electoral districts. The act says that the population of a proposed electoral division should be no more than 25 per cent above or below the average population proposed for electoral divisions. There is an exception for four special electoral divisions which have a population that is up to 50 per cent below the average population. This exception is intended to deal with situations where the riding is extremely or

unreasonably large and certain other provisions laid out in the legislation. The 25 per cent deviation from average population is intended to be rare and not the norm. The early appointment of the commission will give it time to consider the population of the electoral divisions and protect that right.

With respect to the commission's use of population information, the second proposed amendment would clarify a current section of the act dealing with information that the commission must and may use when determining the population of Alberta. The act says that the commission must use the population information in the federal census carried out every 10 years, the decennial census. However, if there is a more recent province-wide census, such as one that's carried out every five years, the commission must use that population information. The act does not explicitly state that the commission may use population information which is collected not on a province-wide basis such as municipal population information censuses conducted by individual municipalities. The proposed amendment clarifies this authority but does not represent a change in policy. The last Electoral Boundaries Commission used municipal census data and found it helpful in their determinations.

Madam Speaker, these amendments are important to protecting Albertans' rights to effective representation, and I ask for support on these amendments.

At this time I would like to adjourn debate on this issue.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise, first of all, to say that I think we made incredible progress today, moving through a number of very important bills.

Seeing the time, I'm actually going to request unanimous consent from the House to adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow at the request of the opposition to give them the opportunity to prepare for tomorrow's budget.

[Unanimous consent granted; the Assembly adjourned at 5:50 p.m.]

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