



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 2, 2016

Day 20

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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

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Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
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Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
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Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

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.

Monday, May 2, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let each of us in our own way reflect. Hon. members, I'd like to take this opportunity to reflect upon April 28, which occurred last Thursday and is a day when people across Canada stop to remember those workers who were killed, injured, or disabled in any number of work-related situations, including our emergency services. Life is precious. When it is lost, all of us are impacted. In a moment of silent contemplation may we allow ourselves to remember those taken before their time, those who have suffered and are suffering through tragedies, and to reach out to their families, friends, neighbours, and communities most immediately impacted.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Welcome back, hon. members. It's a beautiful day out there. Please be seated.

The Clerk: Introduction of Guests.

The Speaker: I think I have a visitor, hon. Clerk.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you. It is my great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 80 students who are here today as participants in Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day program. Offered annually since 2003, this program strives to further develop the interest in and understanding of our parliamentary system among Alberta youth. These high school students arrived on Sunday and since then have been participating in a variety of activities. They've toured the Legislature, attended workshops about parliamentary history and procedure, and they were able to network with Legislative Assembly staff to learn about the work they do in supporting the members of this Assembly. Today they're observing question period, and tomorrow they'll debate a resolution in this very Chamber, which will be presided over by yourself, Mr. Speaker. During this debate the students will be given a unique perspective on the work done by the members of this Assembly, and following the debate the students will visit MLA offices and attend a lunch with MLAs. I would ask that all of our MLA for a Day participants, who are seated in both the members' and public galleries, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. MLA students for a day, I must point out to you – you will learn, as many of my peers are learning – that it wasn't the Clerk who screwed up; it was me.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I would recognize the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 30 students from the McKernan jazz band, which you heard during the lunch hour here in the Legislature building. The band is comprised of students in grades 8 and 9 who have been playing for two to three years in the school music program. They are here today to celebrate Music Monday, a national event that began in 2005 and has grown to be the world's largest single event dedicated to raising awareness for music education. These students provide evidence that music education is alive and well in Alberta schools, and we believe that it is a valuable component of a well-rounded education. They are accompanied by their teacher, Carol Thurgood, and by parent volunteers. They are seated in the public gallery this afternoon, and I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. 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 members of the Baraza of Kivu Association who are joining us today in the gallery. Gerard Mutabazi Amani, Kamengele Kyalumba Kam, Cloti Katana Nsimire, Amanda Songolo, and Justine Maman Katana work in my riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to help newcomers from Kivutias and across Africa master English while celebrating their Swahili language and culture, set up sport and recreation opportunities, and, most importantly, work with other community organizations to build understanding that leads to co-operation. Their dedication reminds us that no matter who we are or where we are from, in Alberta we can be proud of our roots and give back to our hometowns and cities. I'd ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you an Edmonton preschooler who loves to play with trucks and cars and construction vehicles and may actually have his favourite white truck here with him today. It's not really a surprise that three-year-old Isaac wants to be a doctor when he grows up given the amount of time he has spent in the hospital. Diagnosed with a cow's milk protein allergy, he suffered from gastrointestinal infections, requiring long stays in the hospital and a specialized diet. Isaac is joined by his parents, Lisa and Ira Caskenette, whose tireless efforts advocating for provincial coverage of the medically necessary formula that Isaac required have been heard, and now other children like him who require Neocate will be able to access this formula under provincial coverage. I would ask Isaac and his parents, Lisa and Ira, to please rise and remain standing.

Also joining us today are Natalie Trinh and her six-month-old daughter, Eleanor. Like Isaac, Eleanor has been through a lot in her young life. Despite her health challenges, she is an easygoing,

happy baby who always keeps her older brother and sister entertained. But there were some anxious days and nights when Eleanor was only days old and was in and out of the neonatal intensive care unit, also suffering from an allergy to cow's milk protein. Now, after being put on specialized formula, she is doing much better, and she really is one tough little girl. I ask Natalie Trinh and baby Eleanor to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly an honour to rise today, the day after May Day, to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several local leaders in the labour movement. First of all, we have Doug O'Halloran, president of my former union, UFCW local 401, whose support, I know, many members in this House are thankful for. Also joining us are Mike Scott, president of CUPE local 30; Ramon Antipan, former president of CUPW; Quinn Benders, VP of NASA; Lindsay Baranowski, treasurer of NASA; Heather Smith, president of UNA; Jane Sustrik, first VP of UNA; Siobhan Vipond, secretary-treasurer of the AFL; Elisabeth Ballermann, president of HSAA; and Mike Parker, VP of HSAA. These folks work hard every day to ensure that all workers in this province have the best possible conditions and representation. I would now ask if it's possible for them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour to rise today and introduce an inspirational Albertan who, I'm very proud to say, happens to be a fine constituent of Calgary-Lougheed. Jill Drader is an entrepreneur who, as a journeyman tile setter and stoneworker, is an incredible role model for women in the trades and for every other Albertan, as a matter of fact. Jill encourages other women to consider careers in the skilled trades through her women in workboots digital research project and her consultancy practice, Steel Toe Stiletto. The entrepreneurial trades program she developed is now a five-credit high school course which gives students business and entrepreneurial training alongside their trades training. Her new venture is recovery transformation, a series of workshops and retreats for women in recovery like Jill herself, who has more than a decade without alcohol in her life. At this time I'll ask Jill to stand to receive the hearty welcome of this Assembly. It's an honour to know you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a very special guest who is working in my Calgary constituency office for the summer. Josip Tomic is keenly interested in politics, and after working for Elections Canada during the fall election, he reached out to my office, and we are happy to have him onboard. Joe is also a learner at Bow Valley College in the business administration career program. His inclusion in courses and on campus is facilitated by an initiative on campus called inclusive postsecondary education, a partnership between Inclusion Alberta and Bow Valley College. Joe is here today with his parents, Bore and Slavica Tomic, as well as Caitlin Wray, a representative from Inclusion Alberta. My guests

are seated in the public gallery. I ask the parents as well as Caitlin to please stand up. Joe, if you can give a nice warm wave, we'd appreciate that. Joe is up in the corner there. Thank you very much. Can we please give him the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce a small but mighty school group from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. They are from the Shepherd home-school. They are some of the finest constituents in all of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Today we are joined by one of the top teachers in all of the province, Sarah Shepherd, and her children Aravis, Aiyla, Kira, and Graydon. If you'd please rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other guests for introductions today? Calgary-Hays has a guest.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the president of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, Adriana LaGrange. I would ask all members to join me in giving her the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

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

National Day of Mourning

North American Occupational Safety and Health Week

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is North American Occupational Safety and Health Week. It is dedicated to promoting awareness of the importance of safe and healthy workplaces. Safety on the job is a crucial issue for this government and for all Albertans. This week is a reminder of that fact, as was last week. Last Thursday we marked the National Day of Mourning, a day to remember workers killed or injured in work-related incidents. Workers' Compensation Board numbers show 125 work-related fatalities in 2015. Many more workers suffered injuries and illnesses. A single workplace death touches so many lives. Families, friends, and co-workers are left heartbroken.

Unfortunately, last week we also received tragic news of two separate workplace fatalities in our province, two more families whose loved ones never came home at the end of the day, more communities struggling to come to terms with loss. In this House – and I consider this House one of my communities – we also experienced a devastating loss. Mr. Speaker, Manmeet Singh Bhullar was 35 years old when he was killed on November 23 of last year. Manmeet was on his way to work when he stopped to help a fellow Albertan in a winter storm. It was an act of kindness that exemplified Manmeet's dedication to Albertans. But beyond the loss that this House felt and that our province felt as well for a well-respected public servant, Manmeet was a husband, a son, a brother, and a friend. Our thoughts are with his family, and our thoughts are with all Albertans affected by workplace deaths and tragedy.

While we remember those we lost, we honour their memory by making an even stronger commitment to safer workplaces. I believe that employers, workers, labour groups, industry organizations, and

government all have a role to play in helping workers get home safely at the end of the day. During North American Occupational Safety and Health Week and all year long I encourage all Albertans to be mindful of workplace safety. Know your rights and responsibilities so that you can keep yourself and those around you safe and healthy. The Alberta government will continue to make sure employers are taking all necessary precautions to keep workers safe. We will work to create safe, fair, and healthy workplaces across this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to the annual National Day of Mourning, observed this past April 28. This day recognizes the meaningful lives and memories of those who have lost their lives in the course of their work. Last year 125 Albertans never came home from work, their lives cut short far too soon. These are not mere statistics. Each life has an inherent value. Each person had hopes and aspirations. Each of those lives represents someone's parent, child, spouse, sibling, or friend, someone who said goodbye in the morning not knowing that that goodbye would be their last. Today our thoughts and prayers are with the families and loved ones who mourn their loss on a daily basis and whose hearts will never fully be whole again.

Each of us here experienced such a loss when our former colleague Manmeet Singh Bhullar suddenly and tragically died this past November. To this day words do not adequately convey the sadness that I know all members here feel over his loss. We must also be mindful of those Albertans who survived workplace accidents but to this day are suffering the consequence of serious injuries that occurred in their workplace. Twenty-six years ago, one month after I married my beautiful bride, I suffered a workplace accident that almost killed me. Still to this day I suffer from chronic back pain, a constant reminder that it takes only one slip-up to potentially alter one's life.

In recent years many employers and industries have worked in partnership to improve workplace safety and to improve on-site education and workplace practices. They should be commended for these efforts. We know that campaigns for safer workplace practices can achieve meaningful, life-saving results. In the late 1970s nearly every year approximately 10 Albertans died from unsafe excavations and trench work. This was just in one area of work in construction. The result of public outcry and public education campaigns was that these trench and excavation deaths were eliminated by 1985. These workplace education efforts need to be continued.

1:50

Everybody who leaves for work each day should be able to feel that they can return home safely to their loved ones. As we remember the victims of workplace accidents, those who lost their lives and those severely injured, we are reminded of the importance of ensuring that as a province we remain committed to the highest standards when it comes to keeping each of us safe.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would request unanimous consent from the House to permit a member of the third party as well as the two independents to respond to the ministerial statement.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day when Albertans head off to work to earn a living and perform the jobs that keep our province and our economy moving forward, they have the right to expect that they will return home safely. Tragically, last year 125 workers did not make it home to their families, including our own Manmeet Bhullar, who was killed in a motor vehicle incident on the number 2 highway. Manmeet was an advocate, and as an MLA accomplished more in his short years than some of us ever will. We miss him today and always will.

Mr. Speaker, each of the 125 people has their own unique stories and their own distinctive attributes that contribute to a great Alberta. The Progressive Conservative caucus expresses condolences to the families, friends, colleagues, and loved ones of those Alberta workers who did not return safely home from work. I recall when I was Transportation minister how shaken I was when one of our own workers was killed while on duty for Alberta.

Government must listen to all employers – farmers, ranchers, and all others – employees; and those other interested parties to make sure that when we're setting policy that we truly create a safe work environment in Alberta. While some people live to work and others work to live, they all deserve to get home safely, and we all share in that responsibility. Employees, employers, committees, organizations, and also government have a vital role to play. Government must ensure that reasonable regulations are in place to make sure that employees are safe.

The Progressive Conservative caucus today remembers those whose lives were lost or permanently altered as a result of workplace incidents. We will continue to work with our colleagues in government along with all stakeholders, employers, employees, and all Albertans to ensure that Albertans get home safely at the end of their working day.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On this National Day of Mourning we take a moment to remember those who have been injured, disabled, or lost their lives while on the job. Sadly, workplace injuries and deaths continue to affect too many Albertans across the province. As the minister mentioned, in 2015 there were 125 Albertans lost to workplace injury and illness. Virtually every one of these deaths was preventable. They tear away a spouse, a sibling, a parent, and friends. Just last week we learned of two more workers who lost their lives in separate job site incidents. Our thoughts and prayers go out to them and their loved ones. A day of mourning reminds us that Albertans have a right to a safe work environment and that we must continue to strive together to ensure those rights.

Last December Alberta finally passed Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. This legislation now protects over 10,000 formerly exempt Albertans and provides them with the same security enjoyed by all other occupations in Canada. These rights, granted to agribusiness employees in all other Canadian provinces, have been long overdue. Despite friction in the early stages, I know these changes will create long-term benefit for both employers and employees.

A healthy work environment is not only physically healthy but also mentally healthy. Today marks the beginning of Mental Health Week, and we must remember that the consequences of mental illness and addictions can be every bit as tragic as those of physical illness. So as we remember those workers lost on the job and strive for such tragedies to be eliminated, let us also commit ourselves to creating conditions supportive of mental health in the workplace. Bullying, sexual harassment, gender bias, and stigma must be

stopped. By continuing to improve the health and safety of workers in Alberta, we continue to honour those who lost their lives while on the job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we mark North American Occupational Safety and Health Week, a week dedicated to promoting awareness of the importance of safe and healthy practices in our workplaces, I reflect on the lives of the 125 Albertans killed on the job last year, their families, and the many more who were hurt on the job. One workplace death is too many, and creating a culture of safety on the job is paramount.

I reflect on my own time working in the oil and gas industry and watching the safety culture evolve and grow in importance. It's not perfect, and there is still work to do, but it's heartening to see safety taken so seriously in one of Alberta's riskiest industries. Alberta occupational health and safety does important work promoting workplace safety, and I'd like to thank each and every worker and student in the field for their contribution to safer workplaces.

On the National Day of Mourning last Thursday I thought about everyone who lost their life on the job, I thought about the families they left behind, and I also reflected on the life of our colleague and friend Manmeet Singh Bhullar, who was killed working and serving Albertans. We often feel safe in this Chamber, far safer than those who are working jobs with high levels of risk every day, and my thoughts remain with Manmeet's family and with all the families and loved ones of those who have suffered workplace injury or death in Alberta. My thoughts are also with those who worry every day about their loved ones on job sites, who fear hearing devastating news each time there's a workplace accident. Many Albertans put themselves in danger each day in order to do their jobs, and we in this House must make a strong commitment to their health, well-being, and safety.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Jean: Last Tuesday the Finance minister vowed to win back Alberta's triple-A credit rating. Looks like it didn't turn out so well, though. Here's the Finance minister summing up his trip. Quote: unfortunately, it did not result in a change. End quote. It's hard to believe that \$58 billion in debt didn't convince credit agencies to change their minds about Alberta. The fact is, though, that this government is making families in Alberta poorer through a new carbon tax and dangerous levels of borrowing. Premier, families are being forced to pinch pennies on every single dollar they earn. Why isn't this government doing the same?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that when you have an unprecedented drop in the price of commodities such that you lose billions of dollars in revenue, you can make a choice. You can download that deficit onto the backs of people, or you can move forward in the way we are right now.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has a very selective memory. You know, for 10 years in Ottawa the member opposite voted for a deficit budget in 2009, 2011, 2012, including the biggest deficit budget in the history of the country. So why – why? – was it okay then, but now what he wants to do is to make Albertans . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Of course, while the Premier was travelling to Washington to talk about her brand new carbon tax plan, that's going to punish Albertans, Albertans here are wondering how they're going to afford it. A typical family will be out at least a thousand dollars a year. Charities get zero relief from this tax, a tax that will make it more expensive to take care of our most vulnerable citizens. Schools will see millions of dollars taken out of the classroom to pay for her new NDP tax. To the Premier: why should ordinary Albertans have to be punished with the high cost of this new tax at a time they simply can't afford it?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is an absolutely growing consensus that the best way to deal with climate change is by putting a price on carbon, first of all. Secondly, it's interesting that the member opposite talks about schools because you know what I always tell the member opposite? Every school I go to, you know who wants us to take action on climate change more than anybody else? The kids. You know why? They are tired of folks like those ones over there engaging in climate change denial and putting their futures at risk. We will not do that.

2:00

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, our children are the same people that won't be able to pay back the debt they're borrowing.

The fact is that Albertans are suffering right now, and the NDP policies are making things way worse. One energy worker feels so alienated by this government that he's marching hundreds of kilometres along the highway from Falher to Edmonton. Jason Dubrule hasn't been called in to work for over two and a half months. That means no EI and not enough money to even pay his mortgage payments. Can the Premier please explain how new taxes and credit downgrades will help any Albertans get their jobs back and earn a decent living?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I can say very definitely is that firing teachers and nurses and taking billions of dollars out of our economy is not the way to protect people's jobs nor to lay the groundwork for the future. It absolutely isn't. Albertans want a government that's going to invest in them, that's going to invest in job creation and economic stimulation, and that is what we are doing.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition. Second main question.

Fentanyl Use Prevention

Mr. Jean: Albertans are very worried about the alarming impact of fentanyl in our communities. Families are being torn apart, and this drug is killing people every single day. Too often those who need treatment are not able to access it. B.C. has already declared a public state of emergency, where the death toll is predicted to hit 800 per year, over two per day. Here in Alberta, where deaths far outstripped our neighbours in 2015, public health officials have been blasting this government for failing again to respond to this crisis. These lives lost aren't just statistics. We need a real prevention strategy. When will Albertans see one from this government?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government shares the tremendous concern about the impact of

fentanyl and drugs even more toxic than that on our communities and in particular our young people. It's for that reason that our Health minister has taken a number of steps to move forward on this. We've moved forward in terms of opening clinics that provide addictions treatment. We've moved forward in terms of making the antidote more available. We've moved forward, working with the federal government, to ensure that it doesn't require prescriptions. And then, of course, we've engaged in additional funding to ALERT to ensure . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Concern is great, but action is needed. Moms, dads, grandparents are all watching their families suffer because of this very dangerous drug. They were promised six months ago by this government a draft treatment strategy to handle the crisis. Today: zero. We're still waiting. A state of emergency in B.C. means they are able to collect real-time information so they can be better equipped to help high-risk communities. It's not an answer to the crisis, but it's another tool, and it'll help more than anything that you've done. Can the Premier explain why her government believes a state-of-emergency call would not help those people suffering from this bad, bad drug?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, in fact, I think I have to reject the original premise of the member opposite's question. The fact of the matter is that our minister has been taking a great deal of action on this issue. To carry on from where I was before, we've increased funding to ALERT in order to combat the criminal elements that distribute and enhance the presence of this drug in our communities. We are working with indigenous communities, ensuring that opiate-dependency treatment as well as the antidote are more widely available. As I say, we are opening new beds in order to deal with the issue there. We will continue to work hard on it because we know it is . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this is a crisis. A Calgary mom recently opened up about the shocking impact of this awful drug. Her son has been using fentanyl for four years and is in and out of treatment. She tried to find space in a detox centre in Calgary but found that it was routinely full so spent tens of thousands of dollars in order to get her son treatment. Wildrose has released several recommendations that could help prevent these tragedies and improve mental health care. What can the Premier tell this mom about what they're doing to try to make things better? Simply nothing has been done that's doing anything to help.

Ms Notley: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, in fact, what we are doing is that we've made a commitment as a government to improve and enhance mental health services and addiction treatment services throughout the province. We've already opened up more beds. To be clear, these are beds that would not have been opened if the billions of dollars of cuts that were proposed by those two opposition parties had gone forward. That's just the reality of it. That being said, we are working on finding more services to deliver to more people because we know it's a growing issue and that we need to do better in terms of providing services to vulnerable communities.

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

Openness and Transparency in Government

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the NDP campaigned for office one year ago, they ran on a platform of more openness and transparency and changing the way things are done. However, looking back on the past year, a track record of blurring ethical lines and refusing to disclose key information has formed under the watch of this Premier. How can Albertans trust this government when they tout their ABC sunshine list one day while at the same time they have not updated the sunshine list for government workers?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that that list is typically updated every June, and it will be updated again as it should be. Indeed, the member opposite will be very pleased to see the additional information that is provided in June along with the new legislation that we're bringing in with respect to the compensation levels, that I suspect many people will be calling for once that list is disclosed.

Mr. Nixon: This problem goes deeper than refusing to update the government sunshine list since taking office, a list that should be updated every December and June. The NDP government has been on a hiring spree for political staffers. All sorts of NDP politicals have joined the Premier's and ministers' offices, over 20 positions. When will this government show transparency and respect for taxpayer dollars and disclose the contracts of political staffers?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the salaries of people employed in my office as well as all other people that earn over a certain amount are disclosed. That information is disclosed. Now what's happening under our government is that those people who work for the agencies, boards, and commissions, that actually spend over 50 per cent of this government's budget: they, too, will be disclosed. That's something that we ran on, and that's something that we're moving ahead on.

Mr. Nixon: No, they have not been, Madam Premier.

When the NDP government hired the supposedly impartial reviewer of Legislature media access as a director of media planning, it raised serious questions. Journalists provided unfiltered commentary to Ms Boyd in confidence and on the understanding that her position was a short-term contract to draft an independent report. While the review was under way, it appears Ms Boyd was interviewing for the media planning job with the NDP. Now that she has been hired by the NDP, will she be using journalists' words against them?

Ms Notley: Oh, Mr. Speaker, there's just so much about that question that's wrong. I just don't have enough time in the 45 seconds in terms of the inaccurate facts within it. First of all, the person that the member refers to – I want to say that it's very nice that the member is asking questions on behalf of Mr. Levant. I think it's great that they keep that close relationship.

Also, I'd like to say that the staff person referenced was hired by the public service. It had nothing to do with our office. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? She happens to be a very, very qualified person for the job.

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

Government Policies

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2016 remains a disappointment. Ministers leaving town hasn't made it better. The Premier was in Washington, DC, to promote her carbon tax, which

was curious timing when Washington is preoccupied with presidential elections. In Kananaskis the Premier also struck out. To the Premier: since your trip to DC yielded no results and showed no influence, what can you tell Albertans that you will now do differently to support jobs and the economy?

Ms Notley: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, I really need to take issue again with the premise of that question. Let me begin. In Washington it was really quite exciting to be able to meet with the President's chief adviser on the environment and to have that person come to the meeting fully briefed on our climate change plan and then spend time asking us how exactly we managed to do it and to talk about the elements of it and to find out what parts of it they could learn from. It was extremely rewarding to have them confirm, in fact, that the deal between the Prime Minister and the President was premised in part on the very plan that our government introduced.

2:10

Mr. McIver: Well, I didn't hear any results there, Mr. Speaker.

Albertans deserve a government that will respect their hard-earned tax dollars and show leadership by responsibly managing debt. As Albertans tighten their belts during this economic downturn, it's worrisome that our government refuses to do the same. Last week the Finance minister went to meet with Moody's right after Moody's downgraded Alberta's credit rating. Clearly, the minister missed the boat, was too late, wasted his trip, and had no influence. To the Finance minister: since Moody's made up their mind before you got there, why did you go, what have you learned from this obvious mistake, and what will you now do differently?

The Speaker: The hon. Finance minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's important when you go to meet bond-rating agencies that you explain the Alberta story, that you explain why we're doing what we're doing, what the stimulus will achieve. I explained all of that. I also met with many, many other people outside the bond agency and told them the Alberta story. They're very pleased to know that we're going to stimulate the economy, we're not firing people, and we're going to diversify. That's what they learned.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's story used to include a triple-A credit rating. It now includes a triple downgrading. Quite a hat trick, Minister. The Finance minister said that their fiscal plan would address the risk. The financial agencies blame the risk on this government's refusal to rein in spending and their elimination of the debt ceiling. The PC caucus and Albertans have suggested ways to reduce spending without laying off workers. To the minister: why do you continue to threaten to fire teachers and nurses when there are so many other ways to control spending and debt?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's really quite clear that the opposition leader and his colleague are offside with Albertans. Albertans want a government that will invest in them, that will invest in the economy and will invest in diversification. Folks over there aren't interested in diversification. But I'll tell you what's really interesting is that it now seems they're offside with their supporters because their supporters are really into diversification in terms of parties and leadership.

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

Mental Health Services

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks the start of Mental Health Week, and the Premier knew I'd be here to hold her feet to the fire after our report, tabled December 23. In February this year the government released Valuing Mental Health with 32 recommendations on improving addictions and mental health care in Alberta, six of which the province identified. I've heard very little progress on even these six issues, let alone the 26 others recommended. Given that primary care reform was again identified as a long-standing need with an expanded role of the PCN . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I will actually clarify that we've actually opened a number of the beds that were committed in the first six priority recommendations from the mental health review.

I'm also very proud that our government has committed more than \$20 billion to help Albertans get the right care at the right time in the right place with the right provider. We promised Albertans that we would provide stable funding for the services that they depend on, and that will continue to be there for them. We're taking a very close look at the PCN model to see how we can build on the strengths of this model, and we'll have more to share on this very soon.

Dr. Swann: Well, given that the number one priority recognized by the report was harmonizing responsibilities between Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services and given that the mental health review was told repeatedly that unclear direction and tensions between Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services have affected timely decisions and quality of care, what assurances can the minister give us that Alberta Health will stick to direction setting and Alberta Health Services will lead the delivery of services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you. This government is dedicated to ensuring that the mental health review will get the resources and support that it needs to carry out its recommendations, unlike past reports that simply collected dust. Alberta Health has been active in putting together a crossministry team to advise and act on the recommendations of the review. The team also includes many community partners and stakeholders, including representatives from our indigenous communities. Their experience with the mental health system was so valuable in this review. I look forward to meeting with the team in very short order and updating the member on its activities.

Dr. Swann: A little shy on details, but in light of the government's own report and also that of the Child and Youth Advocate, can the minister tell us what progress has been made to the promised collaborative addictions and mental health planning with First Nations and Métis communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you. We were very saddened with the report on the tragedies that have occurred in some of our First Nations communities. Suicide prevention is most effective when targeted efforts are combined with broader strategies to tackle the social determinants of health and mental health challenges. This is a principle recognized and emphasized in the mental health review. Through the aboriginal youth and communities empowerment

strategy AHS provides funding to First Nations communities to deliver suicide prevention programs targeted at youth and building resilience. AHS has developed a three-year plan to consolidate suicide prevention efforts across its continuum of care.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for St. Albert.

Midwifery Services

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard from many of my constituents in St. Albert who are advocating quite frequently for increased accessibility to midwifery services. They've told me that families should have the right to choose their caregivers. We need to ensure that we're supporting families to make those choices. To the Associate Minister of Health: how are we supporting the expansion of cost-effective midwifery services for women in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the work this government has done to support the birth choices of women, including midwifery, and we intend to keep building on that. In Budget 2016 we've committed \$11 million in increased funding over the next three years. Using the current model, that means an additional 400 courses of care this year and each year after that. By 2019 that means almost 4,000 midwife-attended births in our province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that midwifery services follow a course-of-care model which promotes cost effectiveness, to the same minister: what are the estimated cost savings for women who choose midwifery care?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member has indicated, midwives are funded per course of care, which incorporates prenatal care, birth in a hospital, birth centre, or at home, all the way to six weeks post birth. It's difficult to compare the cost for a birth with a midwife versus birth with an obstetrician as risk, delivery, and location all impact costs. Certainly, for low-risk deliveries in comparable settings the savings can be significant. However, we see the greatest impact in the well-being of moms and their babies. We remain committed to the principle that cost should not be a barrier to women's choices around birth.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Second supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The feedback I've received about Budget 2016 from my constituents and the Alberta Association of Midwives has been very positive. Given the increased calls for midwifery services and the anticipated increase in midwife graduates, what are the strategies in place to ensure that Albertans have access to midwives should they choose to utilize them?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very important to this government that all Albertans receive the right care at the right time in the right place from the right provider, and that includes

midwives. We want to ensure that women outside the Edmonton and Calgary areas such as those in St. Albert and more remote communities have access to their chosen care. We are encouraging AHS to work very closely with the Alberta Association of Midwives to ensure that the increased courses of care are allocated to where they are needed in the province when women need them.

Industrial Property Taxes

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, over the weekend there were a number of articles written discussing potential changes to how linear assessment is distributed amongst both urban and rural municipalities, which have created great concern amongst all of them. At the March AAMD and C convention the minister said: "There will be no redistribution of linear assessment from rural Alberta to Calgary, Edmonton, or any other city. Linear dollars will stay in rural communities serving rural Albertans." Will the minister confirm that her comments to the AAMD and C members at the convention remain accurate today, please?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The short answer is absolutely yes. Without any kind of barrier I will back up that information. I have no control on what speculation certain authors of editorials may choose to do, whatever rabbit hole they want to go down. However, the quotes that I made in that article remain completely consistent with AAMD and C. What he chose to add to that was out of my control.

2:20

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, given that beyond the linear segment machinery and equipment property are also key components within commercial and industrial properties where manufacturing or processing occurs and represents a significant portion of property taxes collected by municipalities, municipalities still deserve to know, though: is the minister also considering changes to how machinery and equipment taxes are distributed to them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I have made it very, very clear to everyone who has asked questions about this that our objective is to keep rural Alberta healthy and strong and to ensure that the services rural Albertans need are both accessible to them and sustainable long term. Nothing within the MGA review will jeopardize that objective. Certainly, the decision and information regarding the actions we will be taking on the MGA review are forthcoming. I look forward to working with . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, given as we can all see here in the House today – and I asked about machinery and equipment tax specifically – that there's still a high level of uncertainty that has been created about potential changes to how linear and machinery and equipment property taxes will be distributed and despite what you've said, is there a plan for how these changes will be put in place, and if so, when can we expect to learn exactly what the plan is?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I look forward so greatly to introducing the legislation following the MGA review very shortly, later this month. I'm also looking forward – you know, again, the fact is that

it will only be in draft form – to working with all Albertans, to engaging with them fully prior to that to ensure, you know, that it'll be a modern piece of legislation and that it will improve things for all Albertans.

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

Petition on Chestermere City Council

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's now been more than 30 days since residents of Chestermere handed the Minister of Municipal Affairs a petition signed by 5,400 electors asking for an inquiry into the affairs of their municipality. According to the Municipal Government Act a petition signed by 20 per cent of electors is deemed acceptable. The organizers of this petition collected almost 30 per cent of the voters' signatures. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The deadline has come and gone for verifying the petition. When are you going to call the inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we take the concerns of Chestermere residents seriously and want to ensure that trust and integrity are maintained at the local level. I designated a staff member to verify the sufficiency of the petition and prepare a report. I am currently reviewing the report, and once I've made a decision on the next steps, the municipality and the petition representatives and the public will be notified. I will take the time that's needed to consider all the available options so I can ensure that the residents of Chestermere are served by an orderly and accountable local government.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in politics perception is reality and given that in a case like this one it is clear that a large segment of the population of Chestermere has lost confidence in their municipal government and given that it's only fair to both citizens and council members to clear the air on the many issues of concern in Chestermere, again to the same minister: will you commit to launching an investigation into the affairs of the municipality regardless of the outcome of the verification process, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We want Albertans to have confidence in their municipal governments, that their governments are working with their best interests in mind. That is why the petition process exists, so that residents can ask for an audit or inquiry into their local governments. As I stated, I will take the time that's needed to consider all the available options so I can ensure that the residents of Chestermere are served by an orderly and accountable local government.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Given that the problems in Chestermere were allowed to brew for so many months that citizens felt the need to take measures into their own hands and force the minister's hand on an inquiry and given that the minister clearly did not understand the magnitude of the problems in Chestermere when she first began hearing about them and given that the minister is still relatively new to this position and no doubt is learning all the time, to the same minister: what lessons have you learned from this situation for dealing with a similar problem in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly have great respect for the tremendous leadership that municipal leaders show across this province, and built into the MGA is also great respect for those leaders. I work within the processes we have to both support those leaders but also show respect to the residents who have concerns, to find the right balance. Again, I'm taking the time I need to go forward with the right action that is the best choice for both the residents and for the leadership.

Farm Inspector Safety Standards

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, the people are still confused about Bill 6. On March 1 a constituent contacted me about an issue he is having as he attempts in good faith to comply with Bill 6. He was selected for a crop insurance inspection. He requested that the inspector watch a short safety video, have a WCB compliance letter, and wear fall-arrest equipment before climbing up grain bins. The company refused and threatened to deny his insurance coverage for two years. Why are farmers now being punished for following the laws this government created?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the member for the question. I can't speak on a particular policy or review about a private insurance company. I think that would be highly inappropriate. What I know is appropriate is that WCB measures we've taken and placed for farm and ranch workers are working. They're working for the workers; they're working for the ranchers and the farmers to this date. I'm looking forward to have the opportunity to implement the recommendations on the OHS standards themselves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Orr: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the insurance agency in question is the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, a Crown corporation serving farmers subject to Bill 6, they should be subject to the same rules and regulations and given that I have a letter, which I will table, from AFSC saying that they are exempt from employment standards, do not have to comply, that the legislation applies to farm workers and not them, yet wearing fall-arrest protection is mandated by OH and S, I ask: why is this government agency saying that they do not have to comply with Bill 6 on farms when farmers do?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. You know, I feel that he's talking about a particular incident that I would absolutely like to know more about, and I would more than welcome having a direct conversation with him so that we can find out exactly about the issue.

Mr. Orr: Given that I have another letter from AFSC, which I will table, saying that the government's own inspectors are indeed covered by WCB, it seems they are simply refusing to comply with farm safety standards mandated in Bill 6. Clearly, government inspectors do not have to play by the same rules farmers do on the same farm work sites. Since farms face the risk of fines and loss of livelihood, does the minister think this double standard is okay, and what are farmers supposed to do now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. I can't respond on something that he has in his hand that I have not yet seen but absolutely would commit my office and my ministry to work with the member and with his constituents on this issue. I'd hope to learn more and be able to have a response.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Midwifery Services (continued)

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've actually got a real question about when this government told Alberta midwives and expectant mothers again and again that there would be good news for them in the budget. The St. Albert Community Midwives centre will still be forced to close because the Health minister's promise of a bold move in support of midwives turned out to be nothing but smoke and mirrors. Why did the Minister of Health choose to break Albertans' trust with their empty budget promises by refusing to eliminate the cap on midwife funding?

Ms Payne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess that answers my question about whether or not it's a cut day or a spend day for health. We are very pleased with the announcement that we made on budget day. Eleven million dollars over three years is a huge impact for additional funding for midwifery services in our province. We are working with our partners in the Alberta Association of Midwives in ways that we can fast deliver those additional funding dollars to increase the number of courses of care available in that funding envelope.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that this government has failed to address the demand for midwife care and given that the current strategy will force Alberta's midwives to leave the province, making the job situation worse, and given that midwife births save money and could help rein in your spending, how can the minister justify the rhetoric and the lack of real action to allow Alberta midwives to stay here so we can cut costs and give families choice in safe childbirth alternatives?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were very pleased that the Alberta Association of Midwives joined us here on budget day and spoke in favour of the increased investment that our government is making in midwifery care. Under the current funding model that new investment means almost 4,000 more midwife-attended births in this province over the next three years. Beyond that, we meet with midwives and advocacy groups on a regular basis. We know there is strong interest in improving the funding model here in our province so that this new investment can support as many courses of care as possible.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering midwifery is not equally funded compared to other health services in our province and given that choice in childbirth is an issue that should be of paramount importance for a government that claims to care about women, to the Minister of Status of Women: is this the status that women in our province should expect from your government, limited choice and no say?

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government is absolutely committed to women's choice and to providing the services that are needed, including women's health care and choice in childbirth. We're working forward as our finances permit to ensure that women have choice in childbirth, and our partners have been happy with the advances that we've made in our government, advances in choice and funding that our opposition would not have made. Today seems to be cut a blank cheque day, but, sir, we're having to move forward in this economic climate, supporting women's choices, and we're happy with the advancements that we've made.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Infrastructure Project Prioritization

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government promised Albertans an infrastructure sunshine list in the 2015 election as well as in committees and in this Assembly time and again. The Minister of Infrastructure said, "This government certainly wants to let the sunshine in." My question to the minister: when will you publish the full infrastructure sunshine list you promised, not just the school list that our government created in the first place?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm a little surprised by the question as the list that was published in conjunction with the capital plan includes projects from all areas. These are projects that are supporting the services and the delivery of those services that Albertans need and that have been assessed by departments and found to be desirable projects but for which we currently do not have the funding available. That was the basis on which the projects are there. There is a lot more on that list.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that page 53 of your capital plan states that not all projects will be funded and that "this list is not all-encompassing, there are many worthy projects in Alberta that are not reflected here," to the Minister of Infrastructure: where can Albertans find a full list of all worthy capital projects, and why are there no dollar figures attached to the projects that need funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The answer to that question is simply that these are projects that have been evaluated at the departmental level and have met the criteria but for which there is not currently funding available. We will not publish lists of projects, as desirable as they may sound, that we have not done a proper evaluation on nor have we done an evaluation of the potential costs.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier has clarified that "when we talked about infrastructure spending and clarity and transparency in the election, we were talking exactly about coming up with clear, accountable criteria that Albertans could evaluate and see and weigh," to the Premier: where are clear, accountability criteria for infrastructure spending that Albertans can see and weigh?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Well, I'm beginning to wonder if the hon. member has actually read the section of the capital plan dealing with the unfunded capital projects because it's very clear what the criteria are. They are laid out in that section. I just suggest the hon. member should read it.

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

Wildfire Management

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past few weeks we have already seen some pretty threatening wildfires across the province, including in the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry's own constituency. People are concerned because communities in my own constituency as well as others in northern and central Alberta face similar ongoing threats from wildfire. To the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry: what support is the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry providing to communities who face the threat of wildfire?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Member for the question. Our government and my ministry will always do what we need to do to fight wildfires in this province. My ministry supports rural municipalities like towns, villages, and counties outside the forest protection area upon request by providing resources that help these fires, from trained firefighters to air tankers to heavy equipment. Inside the forest protection area I'm incredibly proud of the hard work that our firefighters are doing as we bring wildfires under control and protect our towns and cities. Agriculture and Forestry has 740 firefighters, 88 helicopters, and 88 pieces of heavy equipment ready to fight new wildfires.

The Speaker: Thank you, minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we've had a warm, dry spring and given that wildfires like the one last week present real and frightening threats to Alberta communities, again to the minister of agriculture: what supports will the government have in place should the fire season be extended later into the summer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that it's scary for families who live close to these fires. We've faced this here in Alberta before. That's why it's so cruel for the opposition to fearmonger by suggesting that we would do anything less than everything necessary to fight these fires. [interjections] We're seeing a trend toward drier, warmer springs, and as such we have front-loaded the fire season to increase preparedness earlier. If we need the tankers longer, we have arrangements and agreements in place to ensure that the resources will be there when we need them. The hon. member very correctly points out how dry and hot the conditions are this time of year and how important it is for people to be very careful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate that I was unable to hear part of your answer, and, people watching at home, it's because of the opposition. Given that communities can be threatened and damaged by wildfire and given that it can take years

for communities to rebuild from these natural disasters, this time to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what is your ministry doing to ensure that Alberta's forest communities have access to the resources they need should there be damage incurred by wildfire?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that as someone who has lived through a wildfire that tore through my town of Slave Lake, I am confident that we have the resources in place, and I would not state that if I was not absolutely confident that if there's a fire somewhere that is threatening the lives of Albertans, we will have someone there to take care of it. If by chance there is a fire, the municipal wildfire assistance grant is there to help communities with the extraordinary response to a wildfire and to support the FireSmart programs, which help prevent and reduce future wildfires. I will continue to work closely with the minister of . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Elk Population

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's farmers and ranchers have been trying to bring the issue of unsustainable elk populations to the government's attention for years. Two hundred elk were introduced to the Suffield military base in the 1990s with the understanding that the number would not exceed 800. They have since grown to several thousand. Down south we joke that there are more elk than gophers, but the damage they can do is real. What is the Minister of Environment and Parks doing to reduce these elk populations to sustainable levels?

2:40

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I know it's an important issue for his constituents and throughout southern Alberta. Certainly, we increased last year the number of elk hunting permits, and we are examining how we will do so again this year, increasing those numbers so that we can bring those populations under control. In addition, the areas in which they can be hunted are also being examined. I will have more to say about that in the coming days and weeks.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that the cull numbers are nowhere near the reproduction numbers and given that elk in such massive numbers can destroy crops, break fences, and damage productive lands and seeing as the herds are now moving from more remote areas to the Trans-Canada highway, where the risk to the public safety was witnessed this weekend with a taxicab collision, are the ministers of agriculture and Transportation concerned with these economic damages and safety risks, and are they also pushing for a much quicker resolution to this problem?

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. It certainly is an important regional issue, and that's why the Department of Environment and Parks through fish and wildlife is examining the numbers, and we are increasing those numbers. We'll have more to say about that very soon. We understand that it is a pressing issue for landowners and for those travelling on the Trans-Canada highway.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that there could be now more than 12,000 of them and many constructive proposals have come forth from the farming, ranching, and hunting communities as well as concerned local residents and given that such proposals, including a hunt that would thin the number of elk while donating meat to the province's food banks, have not received traction from this government, why has the ministry been so slow to react when affected Albertans have repeatedly asked for a prompt solution, offered their assistance, and require a definitive resolution for the sake of their communities, their families, and their livelihoods?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, we understand the tremendous impact of the elk herds in and around Suffield, who have now begun to move. We know that they are growing, and that is why the Department of Environment and Parks through fish and wildlife is examining the numbers and examining the counts, and we are working with our partners in the fish and wildlife sector and the hunting community, resident hunters as well as others, to ensure that we are taking the appropriate action. We'll have more to say in the coming weeks.

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

Energy Policies

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The former PC government unequivocally supported Northern Gateway given ongoing confidence in Enbridge's ability to work through hurdles with both B.C. and the respective indigenous communities. During the election the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona stated, and I quote: Gateway is not the right decision; it's not going to go ahead. However, recently and thankfully she conveniently changed her tune. To the Premier: why the irresponsible delay in not standing up for Albertans from the outset by supporting Enbridge and getting products to market, securing much-needed investment, and protecting and creating jobs?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. At the onset, the Premier has not changed her response whatsoever. Our government is committed to working with our partners in both directions to get pipelines built. Quite frankly, when it comes to Northern Gateway, there are a number of issues and considerations that need to be given, so the Premier has said on numerous occasions that it is unlikely that that project will go through because of conditions that have been set by other governments.

The Speaker: Hon. members, out of respect for the other members who have asked the question, please listen to the responses. I along with several others have indicated today that I cannot hear the answer, so respect your other members, and listen to the answer that's being given.

First supplemental.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess this one wasn't in voice mode. I guess we'll check with *Hansard* and see where they made the error.

Given that the Premier has refused to condemn the inequities of the west coast tanker ban and given that the minister of economic development finally woke up just 10 days ago to seek clarification

from Ottawa on the same tanker ban, to the minister of economic development: why did you wait so long to address this critical issue, and why is your government not defending Alberta's best interests by fiercely condemning this hypocritical ban?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the member's preamble is quite confusing. I'm not sure what the heck he's asking. Quite frankly, our government has had the same position from day one, which is that we support and recognize that we need to get our product to tidewater. Unfortunately, the previous government in 40 years couldn't get it done, and the Leader of the Official Opposition, when he was in Ottawa, couldn't get it done. Our government has chosen to have the most robust climate leadership plan in the country, and quite frankly the President of the United States has acknowledged it. We are working to get pipelines built.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has a history of making rash, irresponsible, negative statements about programs and projects that are in Albertans' best interests and given that the bitumen royalty in kind program and oil royalty rates are two of these examples, to the minister of economic development: if you're wrong about Northern Gateway, BRIK, and oil royalties, how can Albertans have faith in you and your colleagues' ability to make responsible, objective, and balanced policy decisions in representing their best interests?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'm a little confused where the member is going with this. I will say that the Minister of Energy, the Premier, and myself have been working collaboratively with our partners and our counterparts both east and west, including the federal government. The Premier has had a number of conversations with the Prime Minister on the importance of getting our product to tidewater. It is absolutely critical, and we will work with our counterparts, unlike other parties, that prefer to pick arguments over social media, or the third party, that failed to get it done in 40 years.

Members' Statements

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

May Day

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and recognize an important day in history, and that day is May Day. May Day is a celebration in the labour movement marking May 1, 1886, when more than 300,000 workers in 13,000 businesses across the United States walked off their jobs in the fight to have an eight-hour workday.

Mr. Speaker, since Albertans and Canadians now enjoy the eight-hour workday thanks to the efforts of the labour movement, might I suggest that some of my colleagues across the way be just a little bit more grateful for just a few of the important benefits that many Albertans, including their own constituents, enjoy courtesy of the labour movement, small things like the minimum wage or a 40-hour workweek. How about overtime pay, occupational health and safety, paid vacation as well as maternity leave? What about workers' compensation and retirement savings plans? Let's not forget things like employment insurance, collective bargaining, and

dental plans, and we certainly shouldn't forget the smallest little one that there is, public health care.

So, Mr. Speaker, if you enjoy these types of benefits and want to keep ideological agendas from taking them away, you might want to have a union backing you up. To my sisters and brothers in the labour movement who are here today in the gallery, thank you for the work that you have done for unionized workers and all workers across Alberta and for the work that you will be performing in the future. Happy May Day.

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

2:50 Government Accountability

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Baseball season is back, and while that's good news for fans of the game, Albertans are getting a little sick and tired of this government trying to slide one past them. The members opposite have been in power now for a year, but the people of our great province are still waiting for the change they promised to deliver. So far NDP change looks a lot like the same unethical behaviour that got the old government thrown out. You'd think that this new government would have learned a thing or two from the mistakes of the past, but so far everything they've done is right out of a recycled playbook.

Let's take a look at the instant replay. They've rewarded their failed candidates with high-profile patronage jobs, they've filled senior ranks of government with friends and party insiders, and they've hauled in a squad of anti-Alberta activists to leech off hard-working Alberta families. If you thought that was strike 3, think again. Now we've learned that this government has failed to update the government sunshine list since coming to office, and they haven't updated the list of political staff salaries for a whole six months – foul ball, Mr. Speaker – all this despite the fact that they've been very busy signing up a long list of players from far left field to long-term, high-paying contracts in government. This isn't a changeup; it's a sinker.

This government deceived the people of our province when they promised to improve accountability and strengthen democracy, and Albertans deserve better. This government has already developed a habit of blurring ethical baselines, and Alberta families can no longer trust them to act in their best interests. Truthfully, it's not the job of Albertans to play umpire. This government has proven it cannot be trusted to manage our province. We've all seen this pitch before, one too many times. Now it's time to sit back, keep our elbow up, and watch the ball because in 2019 this government is going, going, gone.

Government Policies

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, in talking with Albertans across our province, voters sheepishly admit to supporting this government with hope for positive, responsible change, but now they see damaging dogmatic ideology lurking behind the orange cloak while their hopes have been irrevocably dashed as Alberta heads for even tougher times than global economics alone could have wrought on our great province.

I am proud of our entrepreneurial spirit and pioneering way of life and an innovative, can-do stubbornness and pride with humility that carries our brand across this country and around the world. But this alone will not bring the success we previously enjoyed, and herein lies the renowned prairie work ethic that supports our determination to succeed in a community-driven way that shares wealth and the Alberta advantage with our most vulnerable citizens.

And I'm encouraged by our western heritage, that has built an embracing, inclusive society that takes care of those less fortunate while welcoming and celebrating people, ideas, dreams, hopes, and diversity in all its forms, creating, building, and supporting better communities for all. This is the Alberta I love.

Mr. Speaker, this week I heard schoolchildren asking about the fate of our energy sector with youthful but insightful concerns for the livelihoods of their parents, family, friends, and neighbours, young adults fearing the legacy of fiscal irresponsibility and uncertainty for their own futures, the dampening of the spirit of which I've spoken, and the stark realization of having taken so much for granted in their young lives. Seniors share their concerns for the financial burden that will be borne by their children and grandchildren while lamenting the slow and painful death of the Alberta advantage, that brought so many economic refugees to our province from other NDP provinces.

This is not the Alberta that I know and love. Albertans are saddened by the attack on intangible qualities that have driven such tangible results for us as a strong, proud, resilient, passionate, and dynamic province. Mr. Speaker, let's remember the spirit, the proud history, and hopeful dreams for a bright future that we are responsible for in this Chamber and that each vote we make can support . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Kingsland Terrace Continuing Care Centre

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today in this House to talk about the opening of a new continuing care centre, Kingsland Terrace, in the community of Kingsland in my constituency of Calgary-Glenmore. I was very pleased to join the hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing on April 29 for this wonderful inauguration ceremony.

Kingsland Terrace has 24 specialized beds to support young adults suffering from multiple sclerosis and brain injuries. This facility is the end result of the collaboration between the Intercare Group and the government of Alberta. Kingsland is the second facility owned by the Intercare Group, after the Chinook Care Centre in Calgary-Glenmore. Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to see that we now have a new care home available for our citizens in Calgary-Glenmore.

Kingsland Terrace is a unique facility with an innovative living environment that is designed to provide a new style of residential supported living for residents of Calgary. The facility has a wonderful team of qualified care and support services staff, who are always ready to assist by ensuring that residents have all the needed resources and amenities and experience a comfortable and respectful stay.

The Intercare Group has multiple long-term care and supported living homes all over Calgary. Southwood Care Centre and Brentwood Care Centre have been providing excellent support to the community for the past several years. The Intercare Corporate Group is an Alberta-based organization providing health and life enrichment services in continuing care centres since 1992. The group has received full accreditation with exemplary standing by Accreditation Canada.

I commend the excellent work that the Intercare Group is doing in the community by offering choice, supporting growth, and honouring those needing services with dignity. I would like to thank the Intercare Group for making such a big difference in our society

and congratulate them on their further growth through Kingsland Terrace.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7) to extend the Routine past 3 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Josephburg Agricultural Society

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to stand today and recognize the efforts of the Josephburg Agricultural Society, located in the beautiful constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, and in particular the efforts of the Josephburg Presents Committee, under the leadership of Diane Smith.

Ag societies address many challenges facing rural Alberta, and one of those is ensuring access to top-notch musical entertainment and culture from across Canada. This committee gathers together every year to procure both new and seasoned talent brought in by the Arts Touring Alliance of Alberta. They curate a sold-out season of music at the Moyer Rec Centre in the small hamlet of Josephburg, but really the people that attend are drawn from the surrounding communities of Strathcona, Lamont, Fort Saskatchewan, and Bruderheim, to name a few.

This past season my husband and I enjoyed some wonderful acts, including the Wardens, who sing about their experiences as real park wardens in Banff national park; Christine Tassan and les Imposteures, a talented francophone artist hailing from Quebec; the Rodeo Riders, a musical comedy trio covering artists such as Roy Rogers, Hank Williams, and even AC/DC; Tim Hus, who brings good old-fashioned country and true Alberta folk storytelling to the stage; and finally, a very familiar name to Canadians, Tom Jackson, who has used his music here and abroad as a vehicle for social change.

Every night there is a small army of volunteers that ensure the night seems effortless. Diane Smith's husband, Ralph, MCs the event and gives us his best jokes; Virginia Differenz and Doug Maschmeyer head up the 50-50 sales; Doug and Joanne Heckbert manage the door and merchandise booths; Chuck and Debbie Gerow manage the bar, so it's good that there are two of them; and, of course, many others, too many to be named, without whom the evening wouldn't be possible.

This next 2016-17 season will mark their 40th year of bringing diverse musical experiences to rural Alberta, and I look forward to hosting a few of you this fall at my table to enjoy dinner and a show.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Urgent Health Care in Sylvan Lake

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, the current government has no problem skipping consultation and taking action on policies that hurt Albertans, but when it comes to addressing a community priority and a common-sense cost-saving measure like the Sylvan Lake urgent care centre, all the Minister of Health could say was that she was having, quote, conversations about it.

Well, this weekend Susan Samson, chair of the Sylvan Lake and area urgent care committee, voiced her frustration at this government's refusal to act in a letter to the editor in the *Edmonton Journal*. She said:

Summer is almost here and Sylvan Lake and area is ready to welcome you back to its pristine lake, water recreation pursuits, great dining, shopping and special events.

But please note, in the second largest community in central Alberta, and the second busiest provincial park which sees over 750,000 visitors annually, we have no hospital, urgent care or ambulatory care available for you.

So when you come to see us in Sylvan Lake and you're worried about what you will do if a loved one gets sick or injured while playing with us, bring your own doctor with you. If you are outraged, like we are, write the health minister.

And it gets worse. On June 1 the after-hours physicians-on-call service in Sylvan Lake will cease. After serving as a stopgap measure for Sylvan Lake for many years, the 2,000 to 3,000 patients it served will now have to seek care at the overloaded Red Deer emergency room 30 kilometres away.

Mr. Speaker, this government spent \$2.3 million advertising its last two budgets and its climate plan, yet it won't invest in cost-efficient measures that save lives. I'd like to invite the Health minister to a rally in Sylvan Lake on May 25 to experience for herself the frustration of a community that her department has ignored for years and to hear their response to her childish jingle about the right services in the right place at the right time. The right services are 24/7 urgent care, the right place is Sylvan Lake, and the right time is right now, thank you very much.

3:00

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 11

Alberta Research and Innovation Amendment Act, 2016

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 11, the Alberta Research and Innovation Amendment Act, 2016.

The intent is to increase alignment and effectiveness within the innovation system by consolidating the four Alberta Innovates corporations into one because being globally competitive in innovation means being smart about your strengths and pooling your resources, know-how, and expertise together to develop solutions. This integration will better connect Alberta's drivers of economic growth with the advice and expertise they need to move to the next level. The improvements we're proposing reflect the input of several expert reviews and input from stakeholders.

I would encourage all members to support the bill on first reading and look forward to the coming debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a letter signed by the manager of on-farm inspections for AFSC stating that they are covered by workers' compensation. It's not a real compliance letter, but anyway.

The second one is from the acting manager of insurance solutions for AFSC in which they state some of what I said earlier, and I present it.

The Speaker: The Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask your permission to read and table a brief . . .

The Speaker: Very brief.

Mr. Fildebrandt: . . . very brief letter from Alberta Prairie Meats.

On behalf of my staff and myself, we are honored to contribute these steaks to help you fulfill your commitment to eat beef for a week!

Alberta is home to the greatest beef in the world. When we start with quality animals, we do everything on our part to deliver that quality all the way home to your plate! Our industry achieves this through humane handling and by providing the least amount of stress possible to our livestock. It's not because it's mandated by any special interest group, it's just good business!

Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to table five copies of this letter from Alberta Prairie Meats in my constituency, in Duchess.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the required number of copies of an article from the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta. The article is entitled Private Schools Save the Public Purse Millions Each Year.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Full-day Kindergarten

- Q2. Mr. Smith:
What is the government's projected estimate of the cost to implement full-day kindergarten in Alberta?

Student Learning Assessment Pilot Projects

- Q3. Mr. Smith:
How much has the government spent on the student learning assessment pilot projects for the fiscal years 2010-11 to 2014-15 and from April 1, 2015, to February 29, 2016, and what are the details of what the money was spent on?

Student Information Initiative

- Q5. Mr. Smith:
For the fiscal years from 2010-11 to 2014-15 and from April 1, 2015, to February 29, 2016, what was the cost to the government to develop and implement the provincial approach to student information initiative?

ESL Student Registration

- Q7. Mr. Smith:
In Alberta how many English as a second language students were registered in the 2014-15 school year, and how many of those students will continue beyond the five years that are totally funded by school boards?

School Funding

- Q8. Mr. Smith:
In the public, separate, and francophone school systems in Alberta what was the total amount of funds collected through

fees, fundraising, donations, and gifts in each of the fiscal years from 2010-11 to 2014-15?

Maintenance Enforcement Accounts

- Q9. Mr. Cyr:
How many maintenance enforcement accounts were in arrears and by how much were they in arrears on February 29, 2016?

Whitecourt Healthcare Centre

- Q10. Mr. Schneider:
For the fiscal years 2013-14, 2014-15, and from April 1, 2015, to February 29, 2016, how much money was spent on the redevelopment of the Whitecourt Healthcare Centre, and what was it spent on?

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

Adoptions of Children

- Q1. Mr. Cooper asked that the following question be accepted.
How many adoptions of children up to the age of 18 years were finalized in each year from January 1, 2009, to December 31, 2015, and of those how many were children in permanent care of the government prior to being adopted?

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to discuss this very important question. Just in case there's any concern from the minister, in the spirit of full disclosure I might say that I have a very close personal connection to the importance of adoption here in this province and, certainly, right in my own home. One of the reasons I move the question is that there are so many great things that can be done around this issue of adoption, and it is my pleasure to be able to rise in the House today and speak to exactly that. The government plays a very important role in the adoption process. The government plays a very important role in the success of adoptions.

Mr. Speaker, before we hear from the minister and allow him to propose an amendment – as I understand it, they have some desire to make some changes around this question – let me just very briefly say that I wish we lived in a world where there was no need for adoption. I wish that for every family in Alberta that had children there were never circumstances in their lives that created turmoil or tragedy or disruption inside the family. But, unfortunately, that is not the world that we live in. As legislators we have a very important responsibility, a responsibility to ensure that there are appropriate supports for those who are engaging in growing their families through adoption, that there are the appropriate supports for those who may be choosing to put their children or child up for adoption, and that there are appropriate supports for those in our province who may choose to sign a permanent guardianship order.

3:10

With adoption comes great joy and great sadness, so I think it's a very important issue and one that I am pleased to speak about today. We all have a responsibility in this House to the families in this province, to the children of the province, and it's important that we understand whether the number of adoptions is increasing or is decreasing. It's important that we have real firm data for the House to have conversations around these important issues. It's important that we have some points of reference to see if the government is moving in the right direction or in the wrong direction.

It's my hope that the minister will in fact provide the information to this Chamber so that all of us can help to be responsible to all of those who engage in the adoption process. There is nothing more important for the health of children than stable, loving, caring, permanent homes, and I agree with the minister that the best place for that to happen, first, is with biologicals. Unfortunately, it doesn't always end that way, so I hope that the minister can shed some light on how well we're doing as a province.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for asking this question and raising this important issue. As the member stated, the best way to raise children is to have them in a safe, stable, and permanent house. In that regard, let me begin by saying that the work that our foster parents and adoptive parents do is incredibly important, and all of them, including my honourable colleague, deserve our thanks and respect for taking on this important role in the lives of the children who need this.

However, I would like to propose that Written Question 1 be amended as follows, and I will explain the reason for this amendment.

How many adoptions of children up to the age of 18 years were finalized in each of the fiscal years from 2008-09 to 2014-15, and from April 1, 2015, to December 31, 2015, and of those, how many were children in permanent care of the government prior to being adopted?

So covering April 1, 2008, to March 31, 2015, and the first three quarters of 2015-16.

The rationale for this request is that the child intervention program areas pull numbers related to private and international adoptions by fiscal year only and cannot retrieve the data by calendar year. The information that our department will be providing will be for a slightly longer period of time in that it will reflect numbers back to April 1, 2008, rather than beginning from January 1, 2009.

If accepted as amended, the materials can be provided within a few days of notice of approval of the amended question. I hope that this amendment is satisfactory to my colleague.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: To speak to the amendment, the Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. minister. I will say that while from time to time question period can be a little raucous in this House, there are lots of times when we can all work well together. I'd like to thank the minister's staff for reaching out to my office on Friday and having a small discussion around this amendment. I appreciate what the minister is doing here in an effort to try and get the best available information on this very important topic.

So I thank you, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to support the amendment.

The Speaker: Other members who wish to speak to the proposed amendment? The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. I'll be brief, Mr. Speaker, but I did want to rise and get on the record that I am in favour of this. I think this is an important question. I'm glad the hon. member that raised it and the minister are getting along. I think the hon. member that's raising this is to be admired for his role in adoptions. It's something that I think should be encouraged by this House because I think there's a special place in heaven for people that adopt kids.

I'm very happy to stand up and support the amendment, that sounds like it's got the support of the minister and the government. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any other members on the proposed amendment?

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Are there any other points with respect to the main motion?

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to close.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to close debate.

[Written Question 1 as amended carried]

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

School Funding

Q4. Mr. Smith asked that the following question be accepted.

From April 1, 2012, to March 31, 2015, how much less did the government spend as a result of students being enrolled in private schools instead of public or separate schools?

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the simplest of terms what this question is really all about is the differential between the funding that students receive in independent schools, at either somewhere around 60 or 70 per cent of the instructional grants, in relation to those that are given to public school authorities. I'd like the Ministry of Education and the minister to add up the differentials and to provide the information as a starting point.

But in many ways the question goes much further. If you add in the other funding categories for which independent schools are not eligible, how much are you really saving? Indeed, could the school boards even house the students that are enrolled in independent school programs if those programs were defunded and all students transferred to the public system?

This question cannot really be understood outside of the wider discussion that underlies this issue, Mr. Speaker. That question is: should the government support Albertans having access to a wide range of delivery methods when it comes to education? As it presently stands, we have many models of delivering education in Alberta. We have public systems, separate systems, charter, home-schooling, and independent schools. There seems to be a considerable amount of talk in today's education as to whether we should fund all of the various styles and delivery methods of education. Some of the major stakeholders in the public system of education have stated that they believe that any educational delivery model outside of a system of public and separate education should not receive taxpayers' dollars.

Indeed, we know that even within this government there are many MLAs and members of Executive Council that would support the defunding of all but a system of public and separate education. Reported in the *Calgary Herald* July 31, 2008:

NDP Leader Brian Mason also blasted the funding increase for private schools.

An Hon. Member: Name.

Mr. Smith: My apology to the hon. member.

He said people who want to opt out of the public system and put their children in private schools should have to pay for them. "We don't think taxpayers' money should be financing private schools. I think it's inappropriate."

3:20

Quoting the Premier from *Hansard* on October 28, 2013:

Our caucus is steadfastly opposed to private schooling and particularly steadfastly opposed to public dollars supporting private schooling. We're happy for people to choose to go to private schools, but if they do so, that should be their financial choice and not that of other taxpayers. That same thing applies generally to the notion of allocating public resources to what is otherwise a private, for-profit effort. . . . That's, of course, an opportunity to increase the proliferation of public funding of private schools, which, I would argue, is a bad thing.

Many that support this position will argue that only public education has to take all students; therefore, only public systems should receive taxpayers' dollars. They say that public education systems take all students, rich and poor, from every culture, language, and religion, and that only public education will provide an education where students can mix and break down artificial barriers. Some will argue that the default educational delivery system must be the public system of education and that if parents want another alternative, then they must pay for it themselves. As a supporter of public education I believe there is some merit to these arguments, but I would also argue that a decision on any issue is always stronger when both sides of the question are explored and when actions are taken that balance the rights of the individuals involved.

I also believe that competition between systems makes each system stronger. Those that disagree with having only a public system of education recognize that decisions about a diversity of educational delivery systems must start with the discussion about the principles and the rights that underlie education and that educational diversity must spring from an understanding of the educational rights that Albertans have. This nation was built, Mr. Speaker, upon a recognition of linguistic and religious diversity, and from the very foundation of our nation we have recognized in law the right to publicly fund educational diversity.

Educational diversity was needed to recognize the reality that French and English populations would need to have that diversity if they were to live together in the same nation. We built this diversity into our system of law, and we've recognized it by making education a provincial issue. We recognize it in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms under section 29. In the 1890s the precedent was set that where numbers warrant would determine what options of educational delivery would be provided for parents by the taxpayers.

In Alberta we've built into law the recognition of parental rights, which will play a huge role in the right to educational choice and public funding of that educational choice. We have the Alberta Bill of Rights which says, "The right of parents to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children." This sentiment is supported in the preamble of the Education Act and is also supported in the School Act.

In Alberta the precedent of where numbers warrant has been guiding the hand behind what educational options would be available to parents. Albertans have seen the wisdom of these guiding principles, and we've understood that together they have allowed one of the most diverse populations in the world the opportunity to educate their students in such a fashion as to provide each student with a world-class education through the many different educational delivery models.

The decision to have a diversity of educational delivery models is not and should not be determined by a dollars-and-cents argument. This is an issue that must be decided by balancing the educational rights of Albertans, and those rights are not up for sale.

All of this is to lay a foundation for why we are discussing the question at hand today. What would the increased operational costs be if every student in Alberta received full funding at the rate

currently set for the public school system? Only public and separate schools in Alberta receive full funding across the board in Alberta. Independent schools do not receive full funding from the government of Alberta. At most, they receive 70 per cent of the per-student instructional grant, but they do not receive targeted funding for provincial initiatives such as small-school-by-necessity funding or transportation or capital or regional collaborative services delivery. The independent schools only receive portions of other funding such as plant operations and maintenance or northern allowance funding. So Albertans actually save money when Alberta students choose an alternative delivery method other than public schools.

Mark Milke reports that independent schools have saved the government \$750 million over the last five years, as referenced in the parents for choice website and the AISCA newsletter from March 2016. This is what private sources have estimated. If we are to put the argument to rest as to whether or not educational diversity saves or costs Albertans, then we need the government to answer this question from their own figures.

Will this minister and this government provide clarity for Albertans by answering this written question? Will you help Albertans to better understand how much it would have cost Albertan taxpayers if all of the students educated in Alberta outside of the public and separate systems received the same level of funding? The answer to this question will help to bring clarity not only to the question at hand but could also help to address the wider issue of whether or not there should be diversity in the model of educational delivery.

From the theoretical, legal underpinnings of our education system to the very practical consideration of accommodating students, Mr. Speaker, this written question needs to be addressed. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for his words. I guess perhaps I should have worked in the spirit of my hon. colleague here and looked for a way to make some alteration in regard to this question, but perhaps the member can ask it again in some slightly different way.

These are some issues that we have from the ministry that make this a little bit too complicated as it is worded. There's no simple method to determine if more or less funding is required by government as a result of students being enrolled in private schools as students are funded differently and depending on a variety of needs. In fact, there are many different sorts of levels of funding of students in private schools. Accredited funded private schools, for example, receive partial provincial funding to meet educational standards. Students at these schools write provincial tests, and they're taught Alberta programs of study by certified Alberta teachers. Some private schools receive 60 per cent base instruction; some private schools receive 70 per cent. Then, Mr. Speaker, you have the early childhood services, ECS programs, that are run by private schools and are funded at 100 per cent of the public school rate. So you can see what sort of a tangle it is in regard to all of these different categories, and there's more.

In addition, private schools do not receive capital funding or funding for each of the differential grants, as the hon. member pointed out, in regard to transportation, class size, small schools by necessity, for example, all of those envelopes. So if the government was not providing funding for students enrolled in private schools, some current private school students might be still enrolled in private schools as well while others might be attending public, separate, or charter schools instead.

About 3 per cent, Mr. Speaker, of the total Education budget goes to support private schools and ECS operators. The total amount of funding provided by Alberta Education to private schools was \$216 million for 2013, \$221 million for '14, and \$240 million for the '14-15 school year.

So perhaps if we had a clarification on this question in some way, I could tackle it better. I can't take it as it was described.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I need some guidance from the table. At this stage it's a rejection? Yes.

Are there others speakers to the question?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope that the government won't reject this question. I think it's an important one. While I accept part of the minister's premise that it's not a single calculation in order to come up with a number, it doesn't have to be that many calculations. I think the government could without too much effort actually provide a pretty good estimate, if not an exact number, to answer the question using averages on the information that we know. Of course, if you're going to grind it down to every single student and their individual transportation grant and depending upon whether kids are both in a public school or a private school or a different school, I suppose you could make it sound insurmountable.

Respectfully, Mr. Speaker, it would actually be less work for the government just to answer the question than it would be for them to make it sound insurmountable to answer the question. So I would be hopeful that the government would choose, in the best way they can, to answer the question.

3:30

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on this particular question, a good question. While the minister would like to have us believe that this task is insurmountable, the point is that the minister has all the data. The minister knows how much he pays per student. He knows how many students there are. He knows the difference between all of the formulas. The department is the only one with all the data. Now, my hon. colleague spoke about some private research work that has been done, good research work, but if we want to be certain that the government is making the best possible choice, all they have to do is provide the information, that information that they have.

I have to say that it's a little disappointing that this government is building a track record on saying one thing and doing another. Now here we are again, on another Monday, just seven days removed from the last Monday, when we were talking about choice in education, and it appears that the government is keeping important information out of the public domain. They have the ability to provide us with how much money this delivery model is saving Albertans. What this government seemingly will have everyone believe is that private education, home-school education, independent education is this horrible, oppressive cost to the government, yet the government and the ministry are well positioned to provide the exact number that in fact this choice saves the department.

Mr. Speaker, if this choice was removed, while certainly there would be a number of people who'd continue to educate their children in whatever way they've chosen, some would then be forced to engage in the public system. As a result, if this government thinks that they have a school shortage today, that school shortage would be magnified exponentially if there was a massive influx because of a reduction in funding. In fact, all the good people who choose to use other forms of education for their

children, a very strong case can be made that they are in fact saving the department money. Yet the government likes to say that public education is the – I'll rephrase that. That was unfair of me to say.

The government is saying one thing about how they support choice in education, but it appears that another is true. Trying to prevent real data, the data that they have, from educating Albertans on how much choice in education actually saves Albertans is more than a little disappointing. The minister has been around this place a long time, and he knows – in fact, I have been in the gallery on days that he has debated written questions. Some similar arguments about the government keeping information from Albertans have been used from that side of the House when they were in opposition, and now today it's Chicken Little, the sky is falling, and we're horrible people. That is what we've just heard from the minister. So it's a little bit . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order. Mr. Speaker, the minister in his off-the-record comments here did not refer to the Official Opposition as horrible people. I just wish to set the record straight.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please.

Mr. Cooper: In the spirit of co-operation, that has an opportunity this afternoon, I'll happily withdraw my comments around horrible people.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: But we have heard the minister making comment about being Chicken Little, and some would imply that, you know, Chicken Little, perhaps a case could be made that he was talking about the sky falling and how horrible things were.

My point remains the same. The minister has the information. They are putting together a nice little track record about saying one thing about supporting choice in education and doing another. They have the information, yet they refuse to provide it to Albertans, and I think that's a shame.

The Speaker: Any other members who would like to speak to question 4?

Hearing none, I would call the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon to close debate.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we presented this question to the government and to the minister, we believed that it would bring some clarity to the people of Alberta. We've been having a lot of discussion about the efficacy of diversity of educational delivery models. We've been hearing from some stakeholders that perhaps it would be a good idea to get rid of the public funding of various models of educational delivery.

The Wildrose Party wants to make it clear that we would not support that. We believe that parental choice is an important concept in our system of education, that it's important that those educational models be funded fairly within our system of education in this province. We would suggest that arguments that are used that would suggest that educational diversity and delivery are a burden to the taxpayer would not hold a lot of water, so to speak. We would argue that at the very least what we could do is to go back into the public records, go back into the ministry's records, and to search out just what it costs Albertans to have a diverse system of educational delivery.

An Hon. Member: Of choice.

Mr. Smith: Of choice.

Now, we know that education is an expensive proposition in this province . . .

Mr. Cooper: A worthwhile investment.

Mr. Smith: Absolutely, it's a worthwhile investment.

. . . and we know that it's a life-changing investment in the lives of young Albertans. I think that there are enough teachers in this Legislature who have worked with children to see that education can change a life, open doors, allow kids to be able to engage in a society to the maximum of their ability. Not all children are the same, and not all educational delivery models are the same, and they can meet the needs of these children in ways that will absolutely either open or close doors.

We know that – and the minister is absolutely correct – schools will receive different funding, and different models of education will receive different levels of funding. The minister is absolutely correct: it can become a very convoluted and difficult thing to try to figure out exactly how those models of education should and are being funded, with targeted funding and various levels of funding, depending on whether you're a home-educated student or whether we're talking about an independent school or a charter school. But there is one thing that they all have in common if you are an alternative system outside of the public or the separate system, that they do not receive full funding in comparison to the public or the separate systems.

3:40

We know this, at least in broad general terms, that if all of the students that were home educated, educated in independent schools, charter schools, that if all of those students went into a public or a separate system, it would cost significantly more. We know, as I've alluded to already, that there are private studies that seem to say this, that seem to show us clearly that educational diversity of delivery models actually saves the taxpayers money. So it's a little bit of a mystery for people in the opposition and for many Albertans when we hear people say things like: well, taxpayers' money shouldn't be financing private schools.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:42 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	Panda
Barnes	Hanson	Pitt
Clark	Hunter	Rodney
Cooper	Loewen	Smith
Cyr	MacIntyre	Starke
Drysdale	McIver	Strankman
Ellis	Orr	Swann

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Horne	Payne
Carson	Jabbour	Phillips
Ceci	Kazim	Piquette
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Coolahan	Larivee	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Sabir
Dach	Loyola	Schmidt

Dang	Luff	Schreiner
Eggen	Malkinson	Shepherd
Feehan	Mason	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Sweet
Ganley	McPherson	Westhead
Gray	Miller	Woollard
Hinkley		

Totals: For – 21 Against – 40

[Written Question 4 lost]

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

4:00 Student Information Initiative

Q6. Mr. Smith asked that the following question be accepted. For the fiscal years from 2010-11 to 2014-15 and from April 1, 2015, to February 29, 2016, what was the cost to school boards to develop or to purchase software to implement the provincial approach to student information initiative?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Somehow you switched.

Information management, Madam Speaker, is a fundamental component of the work that we do in government and in all of its facets, especially in education. Indeed, the results-based budgeting final report, released in November 2015, highlighted the importance of those systems that are in place to ensure that the government is able to meet expected outcomes in a timely and an efficient manner. We know that in many ways in this government and for the people that we serve, information and the sharing of information is absolutely critical if we are to function in a timely and efficient manner. One of the key findings of this report reads:

The current decentralized model used for government information technology investments results in duplication, inconsistent investment and asset management and an inability to fully realize benefits of new technologies and future trends.

As I said, the sharing of information is absolutely critical, and it is extremely critical in the idea of education. While this finding relates to government in a large context, it's crossministry information dissemination which has serious implications for the ability to manage in this case student information on the one hand and to ensure that personal information at the same time remains confidential for each of the students.

Now, the recommendation that follows this finding is important for education. It has implications for the provincial approach to student information, or PASI. They suggest to "develop a new corporate applications model and a new investment management approach that incorporates central oversight of funding, prioritization and reporting models." Now, that's couched in all sorts of business model language and -ese, but it really does have some pretty important implications for crossministry initiatives in which the Ministry of Education obviously participates.

For instance, we have something like the regional collaborative service delivery initiative, which is a regional partnership among school authorities, Alberta Health Services, Human Services, and other community stakeholders. The RCSD uses the resources already in place but tries to use them more effectively by having ministry personnel working together. This can include but is not limited to existing mental health supports to speech and language therapy and occupational therapy, all of which are important in education. RCSD partners and collaborates on a regional level to help meet the identified needs of children, youth, and their families. The intention of the RCSD approach is that children, youth, and

families will have access to the existing enhanced supports, but they'll get it at the right time and in their home or in their school or in their community, so it's someplace that's local.

I've heard nothing but positive reports of this service delivery model, but I am wondering about the information management systems that underpin the work of the RCSD. How are these collaborative efforts managed between AHS and Education? How do they keep track of the students who receive services under this model? How do they track the ministry expenses when they participate in this initiative, and how are funding commitments allocated and tracked? Most importantly, I would like to know how they track individual students who receive supports through this initiative and how parents know that their child's needs are being met.

Are students receiving proper screening and assessments? Is there the funding for that? Are they receiving that screening and assessment in time to get the proper supports in place to ensure success? Are they receiving proper interventions? Are the interventions successful? Are teachers, school administrators, specialists able to track the progress as a result of the interventions? Are parents kept appropriately involved in the process? What data is being gathered as a result of the crossministry initiative? What can we learn from that data, and how can we use it to make decisions that will benefit the students' welfare into the future?

More generally, in the report we read that enterprise and ministry support services

provide vital support to the delivery of all government programs and services. This support is provided through internal policy and decision-making capacity, strategic planning, contracted service management and operations in accommodations and facilities, financial services, human resource services, information management, information technology, contact centres and other corporate services . . .

Outcomes for this line of business are to:

- improve stakeholder access to government information, programs and services.

We know that the school boards and the other educational services need to have access to this information.

How well is the money being spent on PASI? Is it allowing them to get that? They need to

- manage and leverage government information as a strategic resource.

They need to be able to ensure accountability. The system has to

- ensure accountability and effective management of resources, investments and risks.

Does it

- enable productivity of government employees; and
- provide effective and easy-to-access processes.

Madam Speaker, the provincial approach to student information, or PASI, took years to develop, and it cost the government a lot of money, but I've never been able to find out a definitive amount. What did it actually cost, and has that money been used effectively and wisely with this system?

It was developed, and then it was turned over to the school boards to implement. Some school boards have developed their own software, and some have purchased software developed by software manufacturers to meet the functionality that is sometimes needed by the government. The entire process and the resulting software applications were not always suitable for some small school jurisdictions. In fact, the system was in some cases too cumbersome and too expensive, and the administrative burden of implementing PASI was beyond the capacity of many independent schools and private ECS operators.

This question is important in light of the results-based budgeting report. How much have school authorities spent on developing and

implementing PASI? Was the result of that investment a platform that allows for information sharing between ministries in a manner that will support both the students and at the same time protect their privacy? Will PASI meet the outcomes of this line of business as outlined in the report, or will school authorities now have to go back to the drawing board to start afresh as the government moves to implement the key recommendations of this report?

The final question, Madam Speaker, is: how much was spent, and were these funds well used? Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for his question. You know, actually, the many questions he asked within his explanation around this question are really good, right? I think that they are things that are worth pursuing in regard to us finding efficiencies around IT systems not just in Education but that crossministry collaboration that we talked about a lot and are working towards implementing throughout Human Services, Health, Advanced Education, and, of course, Education. So within those parameters there are lots of things that are definitely worth pursuing.

So within your own specific question here, though – and again it's something that we could work to probably clarify over time. Our school authorities operate autonomously with respect to the purchase and the use of different information systems.

4:10

Vendor systems may include a broad range of functionality, and school authorities select the student information system that best meets their needs. Each school board has tracking of that IT system and the costs associated with that and efficiencies, but it's not brought together through Alberta Education. Many school authorities have agreed to their time with Alberta Ed to support design and testing requirements, to develop the provincial approach to student information, PASI.

Some school authorities have invested time to work directly with their CIS vendor to test pilot PASI-integrated features to ensure that CIS meets their requirements. PASI integration represents only one component of the capabilities of a larger, global student information management system, that you'll see in all of our school boards, charter schools, private schools, and so forth throughout the province. You know, many CIS vendors have successfully enhanced their systems to be PASI integrated so that they can promote and market their software to Alberta school authorities. We're seeing all of these things, but the short version of it, Madam Speaker, is that those decisions, as many decisions are in education, are choices that elected representative school boards make across the province. So that's where that information does lie, right?

Moving forward, you know, I certainly see the utility and certainly school boards would see the utility of us looking for ways to save money because that's what they, of course, are meant to do, provide quality and be careful with the public dollars, but over time that's, of course, what I'm always trying to pursue in my ministry.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to the question? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the question. It sounds like the question is going to be rejected, which is a bit of a shame. I recognize that there are some unique challenges with the autonomy of school boards, but it sounds to me like the problem that we have here this afternoon is twofold. It sounds like my hon. colleague didn't word the question

right, and perhaps we could have had a bit of co-operation to get to the heart of what the member was trying to accomplish. The goal of what the member was trying to do with the question – and I wouldn't speak for him – in conversations and in the debate this afternoon was to try and get more information.

One of the roles as a private member and certainly as a member of the opposition is to try and shed light on issues or expenditures or challenges that the province faces so that we can all have access to more information. The more information that we can all have, the better we all are when it comes to making informed decisions. It's very, very difficult for even the minister's department to judge the success or not of a program without all of the information.

I know, in speaking with a number of school board trustees in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills just recently, that the department has asked for new measures when it comes to reporting their finances through to the minister's office. I know that a lot of school board trustees have raised some significant concerns about the time that it's going to take and a relationship between school boards and the department or the minister's office. Here we had an opportunity where he could have just asked. He has asked for lots of other things but hasn't asked in this case. Our goal and the member's goal is to try and do our best to be able to judge results of programs. This particular question didn't cast judgment on the program but merely endeavored to try and get some standards from which to work. If we don't have both the objectives and the results – and a big portion of that is the costs – it's very difficult to determine whether or not that was a good investment.

Make no mistake. There are a number of different factors at play here when it comes to people who have spent money on this particular initiative. You know, it would have been great if the minister had provided an amendment to speak to the information that he had specifically, particularly around costs that the department incurred, because it at least is a data point on which we could begin to have a more robust discussion around this particular program.

To reject the question out of hand and say, "Well, listen; school boards are autonomous," which we appreciate over here – the minister does have the ability to ask questions. He could have been very co-operative in nature and not directive in nature and said: hey, we're looking to try and get the best idea on how much we spent. Instead, what we have is the minister just making the decision to reject the question, saying that it's a little bit too tricky and not trying to take the next step and provide information on an issue that's important.

We and, I believe, all members of the Assembly have a desire to get the best available information with which to judge programs, to make decisions. Because we are in a time when there are significant pressures in all dollars we spend, we all have a responsibility to ensure that the government is spending those resources as effectively and as appropriately as possible. To just reject this question I don't think speaks to the importance of the resources that have been spent, as I said, even in the form of providing the very hard data that the minister has available to him today in the form of what his department spent on this particular initiative. I hope that it's not a trend that we see moving forward.

I know that my hon. colleague has asked a couple of questions here to the Department of Education. Fortunately, about half of them, I believe, are going to be answered, so I will say thank you to the minister for that because when the government does the right thing and provides the information that the opposition feels is reasonable and appropriate to legislate from, we should be appreciative of that. We're not going to see eye to eye on all things; on few things it is more likely than not. But I do appreciate the fact that the minister has answered a couple of the questions that my

hon. colleague has asked. It is a little disheartening that the last two questions we've debated here are going to be rejected.

I hope that on a go-forward basis we can work a little bit more collaboratively to make sure that we're asking the right questions. I know that members on this side of the Assembly, where possible, are happy to work together to try and get the information that all Albertans may want to have access to.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon to close.

4:20

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to start by suggesting that when you begin a new job, there are times when you do have to learn, and sometimes you turn to the veterans in that job. You ask for their advice, and you watch how they do their job, and as you begin to progress in your job, hopefully, you learn. This member of the Legislature is trying to do that as we speak.

I know that there are times when I have done a great deal of learning from some of the veterans in my caucus, and I have learned a lot from individuals even to the left of me about how this . . .

An Hon. Member: I'm to the right.

Mr. Smith: Oh, you're to the right.

I know that as I progress through these ideas of trying to get information that would help education and the students of Alberta, there are times when I've been in my classroom and I have had to say to the kids that the right question is indeed important to ask.

In my defence I would also perhaps suggest that when we asked this question, it was a starting point. It's a starting point to begin to get a better understanding of just how effective the PASI student information initiative has been. Let's start by asking some of the really obvious questions. Let's start by knowing – and I know the minister understands this very clearly – that we are in the information business in this Legislature and in this government and that the sharing of information is critical. If we're going to be able to govern well, we have to get a clear picture of how things come together and why decisions are being made the way they are being made.

In education it's no different. Perhaps we start by first asking what it's costing the school boards to purchase this information system and whether it's a wise use of those funds. I believe that in an economic climate like we're in today, where we've got too few resources and very much need, we have to make some tough choices sometimes. Because we know that we don't want to negatively affect and impact the classroom directly, we have to look in education at other areas, but it's perhaps pretty difficult in education because so much of those resources are poured into teachers and poured into classroom supports.

So where do we look? Well, perhaps PASI is one of them. So we use those resources hopefully wisely, but we have to ask the question: what do they cost? We know that in life we make better judgments when we have better information, so if we're going to find out if this is an appropriate system, it means, then, that we need to make sure that we've got the information, and it starts by asking: what is it costing school boards, and is it a wise use of their funds?

I guess it is a little disappointing. As my colleague has said, to reject this and decide to not walk down this path is disappointing because it could help by ensuring that there are resources being spent in appropriate places in education. We don't know just yet how much money has been poured into this. So how can we start asking the other questions if, first, we don't know what those are?

It would have been nice – I guess maybe I shouldn't prejudice. Maybe the rest of the House here will in fact support this request. I would ask this House and this minister to consider that this is one way that we can pursue, perhaps, some wise stewardship of resources without affecting classroom teachers directly or class counts. It would allow us to be able to at least have the conversation.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 6 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:25 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Barnes	Gotfried	Panda
Clark	Hanson	Pitt
Cooper	Hunter	Rodney
Cyr	Loewen	Smith
Drysdale	MacIntyre	Starke
Ellis	McIver	Strankman

4:40

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Payne
Carlier	Hinkley	Piquette
Carson	Horne	Renaud
Ceci	Kazim	Rosendahl
Connolly	Larivee	Sabir
Coolahan	Littlewood	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Sucha
Dang	Malkinson	Sweet
Eggen	Mason	Turner
Feehan	McLean	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	McPherson	Woollard
Ganley	Miller	
Totals:	For – 18	Against – 38

[Written Question 6 lost]

Motions for Returns

[The Clerk read the following motions for returns, which had been accepted]

Treasury Board and Finance Ministerial Orders

M1. Mr. Cooper:
A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Energy Ministerial Orders

M2. Mr. Cooper:
A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Energy between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Transportation Ministerial Orders

M3. Mr. Cooper:
A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by

the Ministry of Transportation between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Service Alberta Ministerial Orders

M4. Mr. Cooper:
A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Service Alberta between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Health Ministerial Orders

M5. Mr. Cooper:
A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Health between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Human Services Ministerial Orders

M6. Mr. Cooper:
A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Human Services between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Seniors Ministerial Orders

M7. Mr. Cooper:
A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Seniors between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Justice and Solicitor General Ministerial Orders

M8. Mr. Cooper:
A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Infrastructure Ministerial Orders

M9. Mr. Cooper:
A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Infrastructure between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Municipal Affairs Ministerial Orders

M10. Mr. Cooper:
A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Environment and Parks Ministerial Orders

M11. Mr. Cooper:
A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Environment and Parks or its predecessor between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Advanced Education Ministerial Orders

M12. Mr. Cooper:
A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Advanced Education or its predecessor between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Education Ministerial Orders

M13. Mr. Cooper:
A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by

the Ministry of Education between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Indigenous Relations Ministerial Orders

M14. Mr. Cooper:

A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Indigenous Relations or its predecessor between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Agriculture and Forestry Ministerial Orders

M15. Mr. Cooper:

A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry or its predecessor between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Culture and Tourism Ministerial Orders

M16. Mr. Cooper:

A return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism or its predecessors between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

Government Retreat at Camp Chief Hector YMCA

M17. Mr. Cooper:

A return showing copies of all documents relating to the fall government staff retreat held at the Camp Chief Hector YMCA from September 18 to 20, 2015, including a list of participants, a breakdown of costs, and agendas.

Ministerial Correspondence

M19. Mr. Cooper:

A return showing copies of any correspondence – including but not limited to letters, e-mails, or phone messages – sent between the ministries of Infrastructure, Treasury Board and Finance, and Executive Council in preparation for appearing before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on February 3, 2016.

FOIP Annual Report 2013-14

M26. Mr. Cyr:

A return showing a copy of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy annual report 2013-14, prepared by the government of Alberta.

FOIP Annual Report 2014-15

M27. Mr. Cyr:

A return showing a copy of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy annual report 2014-15, prepared by the government of Alberta.

Budget 2015 Online Survey Responses

M31. Mr. Fildebrandt:

A return showing copies of the responses that the government received from Albertans through its online survey on their priorities for Budget 2015.

Government Documents and Briefings

M33. Mr. Cooper:

A return showing copies of documents and briefings, including PowerPoint presentations, outlining the internal

government process for the preparation of government legislation.

4:50

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would request unanimous consent from the Assembly that in the event of a recorded vote being requested for any of the written questions or motions for returns now standing on the Order Paper, the bells be shortened to one-minute intervals.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Ministry Legislation Plans

M18. Mr. Cooper moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the most recent three-year legislation plan for each ministry.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Approximately one year ago Albertans chose a new direction for the province. This Thursday will be the one-year anniversary of the election of this government. At that time Albertans were hoping for a new, open, transparent form of government. The question that's before the House, in many respects, is going to reveal how much has changed from the previous government to this government. This question, the motion for a return, speaks to the direction and the ongoing direction of the new government and whether or not they're going to do things differently and provide this House and all Albertans a bit of a road map moving forward over the next period of time. In this particular question I had the opportunity to ask for three years of the most recent legislative plan for each ministry. It doesn't mean exactly the pieces of legislation but a plan that each ministry has for potential areas of need inside the department when it comes to legislating, when it comes to the Legislature.

The government has an opportunity to provide a sense to the opposition and to Albertans of exactly what the needs are going to be over the next number of years. That's not to say that those needs won't change. That's not to say that the plan provided, or hopefully provided, today isn't a flexible one, but it will give Albertans a general sense of what the needs of the ministry are and will also provide the opportunity for Albertans to discern the direction that this government is likely to take.

I might just add that should the question be rejected because of the timeline, three years, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that as the mover of this motion for a return I'd be more than happy to accept an amendment around shortening that timeline to 12 months, 24 months, whatever the government might see fit. But it is a bit of a line-in-the-sand day. I know that the previous government, some would say, acted under a lot of secrecy and discussion, with lots of decisions solely around the cabinet table, not opening up all of those things but deciding amongst a small group of people. This is an opportunity for the government to provide a sense.

I also recognize that there may be some of those things that are too sensitive to provide, and I might just add that I would be willing to have some discussion around some of those things that, in fact, might be too sensitive and might prevent the government from wanting to answer this question today.

In light of the time – and I'd love to hear from the government on their plan for this question; I have a sneaking suspicion that they're not very keen to answer it – on behalf of the people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and all Albertans, that are really looking for some guidance and direction on where the government is going over a longer period of time than just a legislative session, I sure

hope that they will have the desire to share that information with all of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While I hate to disappoint the hon. Official Opposition House Leader on this point, I know he had a sense that we might be rejecting it. Might I suggest that he probably drafted a question that he knew would be rejected because this speaks to the heart, goes to the heart of cabinet confidentiality. That is, I think, the core of it. These are internal working documents of Executive Council, and as such they are privileged and subject to the protections related to cabinet confidences. Moreover, these plans are very fluid, and they change very often, depending on any number of circumstances, and there is no formal process for their approval. They are often generated at the departmental level, and they may not reflect the priorities of the ministers or of the government, and they do not necessarily reflect decisions made by ministers or the cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, there's another real concern, that releasing this information could certainly jeopardize and prejudice consultations with stakeholders. I think we have learned in the year that we've been the government that it is important to consult with stakeholders, and to publish lists of legislation before that's been done is not fair to them and makes the work of the government that much more difficult. Some departments may not use the same time frame as others. I appreciate that the members opposite would like to seek information about our legislation plans, but there is an outline of the plans of the government that is provided, and that is contained in the Speech from the Throne. Until we have finalized the legislation and approved it to come forward, any lists are potentially more speculative than anything else.

With respect to that, I don't think there's a lot of value in bringing forward these very flexible plans and releasing them, particularly because they contain decisions that have been made in cabinet and, as such, are privileged.

I urge all hon. members to reject the Official Opposition House Leader's motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've had a request for unanimous consent to introduce some guests of one of the members.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Assembly for allowing the introduction at this point. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the president of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, Adriana LaGrange, as well as past president Tony Sykora. I would ask them to stand, and I would ask members to join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.
5:00

The Speaker: I have another request. Is that right?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly

Mr. John Tomkinson. John is a pilot and an air traffic controller who moved to Wetaskiwin in 2006 with his wife and his young family. Since then he's become involved in many ministries with the Sacred Heart parish. Mr. Tomkinson is the chair of the St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic school board and was motivated to seek the position because of his great interest in protecting and advancing the delivery of education centred on the Catholic faith. John is also the vice-president of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, and his volunteer experience includes speaking at community and men's groups' retreats and conferences about God's impact on his life. John is a proud father of eight children. May I ask Mr. Tomkinson to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

I hesitate to interrupt the House, but the time limit for consideration of this item has concluded.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Educational Delivery Choices

504. Mr. McIver moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to affirm its commitment to allowing parents the choice of educational delivery for their children, including home, charter, private, francophone, separate, or public education programs.

Ms Luff moved that Motion 504 be amended as follows:

- by striking out "affirm" and substituting "support public education, including francophone and separate schools, while affirming";
- by adding "and" after "charter,";
- by striking out "francophone, separate, or public";
- by adding "in such instances where they offer alternatives not available in the public system" after "programs".

[Debate adjourned on the amendment April 18: Mr. Cooper speaking]

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I rise to request unanimous consent for two motions. The first is to seek unanimous consent such that the amendment to Motion 504, which is currently on the floor, be withdrawn.

I will just also mention the second one because they go together: seeking unanimous consent that the time spent on Motion 504 on April 18 be taken out of debate time and thus not count towards the time limit set out for motions other than government motions under Standing Order 8(3), with the understanding that at 5:55 today the mover be given five minutes to close debate unless the motion is voted on sooner.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm advised by the table that there are two motions contained within that. The first motion is to give unanimous consent for the amendment to be withdrawn.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The second is for a total of 55 minutes of debate. Do I correctly understand that?

Mr. Mason: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and that is with the understanding that the speaking list would not start over again.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise. It's nice when the House can work together to get out of a bit of a jam that we found ourselves in not 14 days ago. It is an important discussion, and it's one that we've had a little bit of an opportunity to speak about just this afternoon around this very fundamental discussion around choice in education and who is responsible for educating their children and the government reaffirming their long-standing position on choice in education.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a very good history on this particular file of being respectful of the ways that parents might like to engage in the education system. This particular motion affirmed, hopefully with the government's support – and only time will tell. Sometimes the House has a way of taking unique twists and turns. It's my hope that all members of the Assembly will support the motion that the Assembly urge the government to affirm its commitment to allowing parents the choice of education delivery for their children, including home, charter, private, francophone, separate, or public education programs. This is a long-standing tradition inside the Alberta context.

We learned earlier today from my hon. colleague about a number of the good reasons why choice is critically important. First and foremost, as a parent and, I might add, in the name of full disclosure for the hon. Minister of Human Services, I also am an active participant in educating our children. I am so honoured that my wife takes the primary role in educating our children at home no matter where we are in the province. It's something that has been very important to us.

Mr. Speaker, you might have a hard time believing this, but I actually love my wife and children more than I love politics, so in order for us to be able to find a way to spend time together, to be investing in a way that works well for my family, investing into my children's lives on a pretty daily basis, we've made this choice to educate our children at home. For us, we are what's called fully aligned with the provincial curriculum. We teach what is taught in many schools all across this province. We hold our children to those standards, and that is an important choice that we've made in our family.

Now, it's not a choice that everyone should make, does make, but each of us lives in a jurisdiction where we have that opportunity, and it is a very, very important opportunity that we have. Just earlier today I had the opportunity of introducing a number of students from the Shepherd home-school, and I only say that because that is their last name. With the presence of my two children that are home-schooled and the four Shepherd children, a very good case could be made that those two families alone are saving the public education school system tens of thousands of dollars every year. The choice that we've made, in my opinion, is actually helping public education. My children do not require the confines of a school building.

With those seven children that were here, when you count my three and their four, that's almost half of a classroom or at least a third of a classroom in today's time, maybe a quarter, depending on where you live. The point is that the choice that we've made not only is great for our family, but in my opinion it's also great for the province. We all have a role to play in making our province great. The way that parents choose to engage in the education system is part of that. Let me be clear. I believe that the choices in our education system, be they public, private, separate, independent, home, francophone, help strengthen our education system. They help make the whole system stronger and better.

5:10

Our education system is something to be proud of because it fulfills a very, very important role of laying down the path for the

future of our province. Just like we have the pleasure of welcoming school students and other students to our Legislature, they are going to be responsible for the future of our province. Now, it's my hope that we as a Legislature can continue to create an environment that sets them up for the most success, that supports their parents, that supports an environment where children and students have the opportunity to flourish. That's exactly what choice does.

We've seen in many, many situations that choice and competition raise the tide for all boats. Because there are charter schools, because there are independent schools, because there are the separate and Catholic school systems, we have an environment that creates the desire amongst many to be better, to provide the best possible education. I think it's important that we continue to support these choices.

We've seen a number of different schools right across the province, particularly charter schools, that have a significant wait-list. I know that my hon. colleague has been advocating on behalf of choice and advocating on behalf of charter schools and the inclusion of the additional spots that have been legislated for charter schools because these choices are important. It's my hope that today we can see an actual commitment from the government that they, too, support choice.

We've heard the minister on numerous occasions talking about supporting choice, but there are lots of people and, it's my belief, some members of the NDP caucus that are concerned about choice.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I believe your time has expired.

Mr. Cooper: My guess is that it hasn't because I'm on the main motion, not the amendment. Am I okay?

Okay. I'm just getting to the best part, about the government having an opportunity to do what's right. Last week we saw the government meddling inside the business of private members and creating uncertainty amongst those that choice is of critical importance. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that members on this side of the House will rise every single day to defend choice, to defend parents, and to defend families right across this province.

For that, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to support this motion, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to do the same.

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member who brought forward this Motion 504. I'm very proud to rise today and speak in favour of the motion. I think that, you know, again, I've made it very clear from the beginning, as I assumed the Ministry of Education responsibility, that it's very important for us to provide stability and security amongst our 659,000 students and almost 1,600 schools and 61 school boards and many private schools and charter schools and home-schooling. We have just this whole universe of different ways by which we can access a very high quality of education here in the province of Alberta.

I know that from the beginning it's very important to reassure people that those mechanisms are in place, that we provide a high level of education that is regulated through legislation, through the School Act, through our school boards and so forth. The expectation is always there to deliver something that is the very best for our kids. Of course, what else are we here for other than to make sure that we provide a very secure and high-quality education for our children here in the province of Alberta?

Again, I've always said that you can judge me on my actions and our government's actions in regard to funding education. We had a very difficult budget this last go-round, but at the end of the day in caucus and in cabinet people said to me: you know, what are we really here for in the first place? Albertans look for a way to make

sure that we make an investment in education through thick and through thin. It's been a little bit thin, Mr. Speaker, over these last few months, but I think that we reflected the desires of the vast majority of Albertans, who said: let's make a sacrifice to make sure that we're funding education even during an economic downturn like we're facing here today. I'm very proud of that.

That funding extends to all forms of education, using the envelopes and the mechanisms that we've had in place here in the province of Alberta for a long time. Every step of the way, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's very important for people to know that they can invest in the education system into which they've put their children and have the security to know that it's there for the future as well. I recognize that.

Certainly, I spent the last week travelling around the province just to kind of get a sense of where people are at in regard to education, and the results were very good. People were very happy to see that we made those choices around funding for enrolment, for education regardless of what system their children might be in or even in home-schooling as well. The results and the feedback that I received, Mr. Speaker, were very encouraging, and I learned, certainly, a lot about how people are willing to make that sacrifice.

We know that we need the positions as well. We had an earlier discussion here about different forms of education and trying to quantify the savings that you might make through private education and so forth. The general math around that is clear. I mean, of course, if you're funding at 60 per cent, then you're saving 40 per cent, right? If you're funding at 70 per cent, then you save 30. That is self-evident, certainly.

Many of our private institutions as well provide a very specialized form of education for people with severe special needs, which we will fund 100 per cent – 100 per cent – plus that extra special-needs funding that those students require.

In regard to the charter schools, again, looking to always evaluate every step of the way that there's high-quality education being served, new applications coming in, extensions coming into our department, if anything, Mr. Speaker, over the last year we've endeavoured to try to make that more of an independent process that uses a set criteria that would lessen the likelihood of, you know, people trying to jump the queue or something like that or otherwise making an evaluation on anything but what the independent ministry and the regulations would allow.

Yeah, I'm very proud of the education system that, first of all, produced me, K to 12, and then, you know, educated my own children. I worked as a teacher for 20 years. You know, it's not a question, Mr. Speaker, of trying to just defend education but, rather, to strengthen it in all ways. I think that as we all work together with the best of intentions to do that, we will always be successful in strengthening education. Certainly, I know that it's very difficult to suggest that anybody would have anything but those best intentions in mind as they help us with legislation here.

5:20

I thank the hon. member for his motion. Again, I do recognize that I always have to keep repeating messaging around all of the things that we do. I mean, we can't just say it once – we're going to say it every day – and, you know, I say it very often. Again, the best way to measure a government is to judge them on their actions. My feedback from independent schools associations, charters, and so forth is again, "Thank you for funding," as we have, "our public, separate, and francophone schools for enrolment." It's definitely a big deal out there, and I've given them the reassurance that they can start planning on a longer basis, that we will continue to do that so that they can make long-term plans for their budgets and so forth, which I think is very productive as well.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the education that we provide here in this province. I'm proud of the commitments, even during difficult economic circumstances, that I know most Albertans want, and I look to the Legislature here in all ways to support that endeavour as I would expect them to do so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I've been really looking forward to making this speech for exactly two weeks, as a matter of fact, as you know. I would really like to start by thanking my hon. member the MLA for Calgary-Hays. I think that the whole province has stood up and taken notice. This is a very insightful motion that he's spearheading. What he's really trying to do, along with so many other students and parents across this province, is simply to reaffirm the government's commitment to one of the most fundamental strengths of Alberta's education system, and that, of course, is the variety of choice that is offered to each and every child and parent in this incredible province of ours.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I won't ever forget many years ago what I read in *Maclean's* magazine. By the way, whether you do or don't like *Maclean's* magazine, whether you do or don't think it's too far to the left, it doesn't matter. They admitted that Alberta had built the best educational system by far in this country precisely because of the choice that other members have already referred to. I can appreciate that, not only as someone who's been through the system – the Education minister had mentioned that he had been through the system as well – not only in my current role as an advocate for advanced education, not only in being a parent of two who are in the school system at the moment but also as a former educator, like some of the other folks in this House. My humble career did span over a decade. I worked in three countries, from kindergarten to university, in many different facets of educational delivery, some of the best years of my life. I will treasure forever the students, the parents, the members of the community that I met, the incredible gains that were had. I never actually referred to myself as a teacher but as a facilitator. I learned incredible amounts.

I got a bit of grief from some of the teachers that I used to teach with a few years ago for, well, a number of things, as you might expect. One of them was for a bumper sticker on my car. It simply stated: don't let school get in the way of your education. They kind of thought that maybe I was taking a swipe at my own public school system. Of course, I wasn't. Incredible things happen within that public school, within the bricks and mortar, but I made a great effort, with a lot of help from parents and some teachers and many students, to take them far beyond the walls of that school to learn in ways that go beyond what we can find in a traditional classroom. I can tell you that the gains were absolutely invaluable, and to this day students tell me how it changed their life and their communities, close and far, around the world.

Maybe that started when I was earning my bachelor of education after degree, when I had a professor who did not put his own kids in the public school system. That's right. He was a professor at an educational institution, a university, the college of education, teaching students how to be teachers, and he was saying that he did not send his own kids to school. You can imagine how unpopular he might be amongst his colleagues. He asked us as students at that time: I'm guessing a whole bunch of you are wondering why you should listen to a word I say, let alone whether or not my kids are social misfits or academic laggards; I dare you to call them. So I did. I was the only one in the whole class. I talked to them, and I could not believe that the list of accomplishments on the social side of

things for each one of the kids that he had was as long as one arm, and what they had done academically and beyond was as long as the other arm.

So the fact is, Mr. Speaker – it's been proven through these examples and so many more right across Alberta – that not all children have the same needs, and that's why it's important to offer these different modes of education. Some choose francophone education because of cultural or identity needs, and our system is set up to protect rights that are enshrined in the Constitution. Some children require different or enhanced educational programs that are more tailored to their and their family's educational goals, and our system does make that happen. We've got 13 operational charter schools across the province, as an example, including in my home constituency of Calgary-Lougheed. I am absolutely blown away every time I meet those students, whether it's in the school or beyond, by what they've done in the school and beyond.

Now, some children achieve their best choice in educational environments through home or even blended options. Our system has that ability for parents to assume direct responsibility for the education of their children and their work as partners within school boards. You know, if you don't want to take my word for it, please take the word as written by Mahala. She wrote in to me after she saw what happened here two weeks ago. She writes:

I am a grade 12 . . . student who would like to speak to supporting this choice in education. Even though I am graduating this year, your decision . . . will have an effect on so many children's intellectual, creative, and emotional well-being. I care about that.

I was in a public school setting until the second half of Grade 5, when my family and I made the decision to homeschool. I will be honest with you and say that by October of my grade 5 year, I was suddenly struggling to learn math, failing to comprehend science, and losing my love of learning. My family and I looked at all of the options available in Alberta, and decided to try . . . the Alberta curriculum through . . . [a] homeschooling centre, which also allowed us the opportunity to travel and later learn online. You guessed it . . . I started homeschooling and my grades skyrocketed. In this method of schooling I was able to learn in my own style and understand my own habits. If I had a passion for something, I could explore it fully. If I didn't understand something, I could look [into and] research it, find mentors, and learn.

It may be hard for you to understand my personal journey, Mr. Speaker, but let me give you some highlighted examples of what I have accomplished, thanks to homeschooling in Alberta. I created my own clean water filtration system, volunteered at a Calgary clean water organization, created my own student group to create awareness on water issues, won the University of Calgary's faculty women's club award for outstanding science fair achievement, and competed in a National level science fair, all before the age of 14. Last year, I was named one of Alberta's Top 30 under 30 by the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation for my continued work in water sanitation and awareness. This year alone, I have been named class valedictorian, and I was asked to guest speak at The Centre for Global Education's event.

She hasn't even finished grade 12 yet, Mr. Speaker.

She goes on:

I relayed my experiences and advice to over 1 000 motivated students via a continent-wide interactive webinar. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that there is very little opportunity in a school setting for kids to work on special projects and express ideas beyond the curriculum?

I now know that had I been within the bricks and mortar school setting, most of my ideas and interests would have been assimilated into the conformities of a unified learning style. It is important for everyone to recognize that not every child or adult learns in the same way. We are all different individuals. What I love about Alberta is that we accept and encourage diversity. The

idea of tearing away a learning opportunity to express one's interests and ideals goes against the values of Albertans. Collectivizing the school system would only create a weaker province.

She goes on, Mr. Speaker:

I was looking up examples of learning conformity on a global scale when I realized that this has actually happened before . . . in Canada. Decades ago, government tried to create a uniform schooling system. This resulted in the assimilation and near eradication of a culture. This is an issue we are still having to address and reconcile today, and, in this age of diversity and acceptance, I find it hard to believe that government would make the same mistake. I am, of course, referencing the residential schools. We are taught in the Alberta curriculum how horrible this conformity was, and how our government is now taking steps forward to encourage diversity. Let this government not make the same mistakes and assume that every child is the same, nor learns the same. My 18 years of life has taught me to learn from my mistakes, adapt to change, and embrace new forms of learning. It is my hope that the Alberta government does the same and chooses to take steps forward in educational opportunities, rather than backward.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that Mahala is being, actually, extremely shy and humble. She's done far more things on the world stage than what she listed, both as a person learning and as an educator, before even achieving the age of majority. She would claim, and her parents would, too, that it's precisely because she is home-schooled.

Mr. Speaker, I truly wish that we were allotted much more time. I've had many dozens of letters along these lines. I have one, two, three, four, five pages I'd like to read to you, but I have 20 seconds left, so I will end with this. We have one of the most globally renowned K to 12 systems. Motion 504 will tell Albertans that this government is serious about upholding the system we have and is serious about providing diversity in the delivery of education.

I urge all members to support this motion and the strong, diverse, innovative system upon which Alberta's education is built. [A timer sounded] There's my time, and I thank you for it, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak on this motion. I'd like to start off by saying that I am proud of our government for making education a priority even in these difficult economic times. We are committed to providing students with a quality education that enriches their lives and prepares them for a career in a diversified economy. Our government supports the rights of parents when it comes to making choices about their child's education.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I will note, Madam Speaker, that one of the first actions our government took was to reverse the cuts to education made by the previous government and to restore essential funding in order to ensure that our students and teachers continue to learn and work in a world-class system. I will note that there was an investment of \$103 million that went directly to support teachers and students, directly to the classroom. This led to the hiring of 740 additional teachers. We are continuing this support in Budget 2016.

I will also note, Madam Speaker, that the government paid \$151 million to support 94 private schools and \$83 million to 13 charter schools during the 2015-16 fiscal year, and I will note that private schools that teach the Alberta curriculum receive at least 60 per cent

of the amount of funding that the public schools receive for each student.

Since we are talking about choice, I thought I'd take a moment to chat about some of the choice in education that's available in my riding of Calgary-Currie. I had a chance recently to tour the Westbrook outreach school in Calgary-Currie, which is a school run by the CBE for students who can't attend regular school during regular hours for a variety of reasons. I met students there who were going to this school because they were working full-time to support a parent in need. I met students who were working because they were supporting a child, as these students are teenage parents, and many other students who are in this program for multiple other reasons. This is a program that combines distance and in-person learning. When I was there, I had a chance to meet a variety of bright, engaged students who care about their community. This is just an example of an innovative program that the public system can deliver and shows that they can, too, be innovative.

Now, Madam Speaker, also in my riding is a charter school, the Calgary Arts Academy. The Calgary Arts Academy emphasizes creativity and collaboration in their program, which, I will note, is the basis of entrepreneurship. I also had a chance to debate in that school during the election as it was one of the schools that hosted an all-candidates' debate during the previous election. It was great to be able to engage with such a diverse and engaged set of students. It's part of what makes Calgary-Currie a great community.

I also note that there is a private school in my riding known as Quest School. Now, Quest School is a very unique institution as it specializes in services for students who need assistance. These are students who are disabled in one way or another and have special educational needs. It brings teachers and instructional assistants and therapists and parents together in one location to create a unique educational plan for each of these high-needs students.

I also have many Catholic schools in my riding, including Holy Name, which is a French immersion school. It's part of the Catholic school district. I will note that both of my CA's young children go to this school, and I hear great things about it and hope to be able to visit it soon.

Now, I note that this motion is about choice. I also note that it speaks a lot about parental choice. I'm going to take a moment to talk to those parents in my riding. I want to say to them that I am proud that our government is making education a priority. I have met with parents who have kids in private, public, charter schools and even parents that home-school their kids in my riding. All of them, Madam Speaker, know that stability in education is key, and the funding that we have provided allows us to protect the services that Albertans rely on. What we won't do is propose massive cuts to education that would mean firing hundreds of teachers and crowding students into classrooms.

I know the opposition says that they've never quite said exactly that, but that is a matter for debate as often the things that they would propose in their reductions and spending would have to result in that, and that is not a road this government will go down.

Now, speaking to parents, I know that some parents in my riding were disappointed that the Westgate charter school was not approved by our government. It has been said on many occasions that the minister is forced to implement the regulations established by the previous government. Those regulations state that a charter school application could only be approved in an instance where proposed programs are not available in the public school system as well as a variety of other regulations. Our minister has been clear that he felt that that particular school did not meet the standards of the regulations.

I know, Madam Speaker, that those parents were disappointed. To those parents let it be known that I and this government will

always stand up in support of parents working to have the best possible education for their children. That is why we are fully funding school enrolment, which the past government did not. That is why we have put actual money into building actual new schools, which the mover of this motion and the previous government did not. That is why we walk the walk on education, and all the former government has to show for itself is this motion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the time to speak to this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm a big believer in public education. My children are in public education. In fact, I've just recently been texting briefly with my daughter in grade 3. Today in school she built a 60-centimetre-tall building out of papier mâché in science class. She's very proud of that, and I'm also very proud of her. I don't know what it says about today when the most meaningful conversations we have are via text. I worry a little bit about that.

I also am a product of public education. Say what you will about that. Public education is not perfect, nor should it be the absolute only choice. Although I am very much a believer in the public education system in this province – and I think it is a fine system and deserves strong support and deserves investment and that it is the solution for the vast majority of students in this province – it is not and should not be the only choice for parents.

In particular, I want to spend some time talking about charter schools. There are a couple of charter schools in Calgary-Elbow. What I really like about them is the nature of them being public schools. They're accessible, they come without tuition, they are nondiscriminatory, and they address specific educational needs. They allow for innovation within our framework of public education. I think it's interesting to note how students have thrived in charter schools but also how many, many of the charter school programs that we see have been emulated in the public system. I think that's exactly the kind of innovation that charter schools were meant to bring about.

5:40

Now, it's not been perfect. I will acknowledge that the relationship between the public system and the charter system has been perhaps strained, but I look at that as an opportunity for charter schools and public schools to find ways of working together and truly sharing that innovation that was intended at the outset.

On the private school side I think this is an issue that requires some nuance. As the Minister of Education alluded to earlier, certain private schools are funded up to 100 per cent per-student funding, especially when we're dealing with students with special needs, whereas the majority will receive 70 per cent of the per-student funding envelope. But not all private schools are created equal, and I would encourage the government to look at the B.C. model, which has some more nuance and distinction within and between different private schools. Those that do provide services for students with special needs, I think, should be considered in all cases for 100 per cent funding. There are others that truly represent educational choice, but that is a choice that parents are making that perhaps should not be funded quite to the full 70 per cent range.

So it's something that as we consider this motion, I absolutely support parental choice in education, but I think perhaps we need to consider the level of funding for private schools in certain cases and look at some of the criteria for private schools.

I will absolutely be voting in favour of Motion 504. I think parents and students deserve that choice in education, and I think

it's very important to say that choice in education does not need to diminish the availability or the quality of Alberta's public education system. I think it can be additive when we have choices and can allow students and parents to choose the educational option that makes the most sense for them and also, in the best case, can encourage the public system to continue innovating and continue to meet the needs of students.

I've spent a lot of time in public schools in constituency weeks and beyond where there are amazing programs – culinary programs, science-based programs, all-girls or all-boys programs, traditional programs – within the public system. I think the choice that we're talking about here absolutely must include the choices that are available within the public system. I think that's a very positive thing.

I'll conclude just by saying that our system certainly isn't perfect, but it would be diminished for not having educational choice, so I will support this motion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to the motion, which I likewise will be supporting. We've had long discussions over the years with our members, and it's been a resolution back and forth on the floor in some of our party gatherings. It's certainly a contentious issue.

I share the views, to a large extent, of the Member for Calgary-Elbow that we desperately need choice and we desperately need innovation. These are hotbeds of innovation and experimentation. There are also critical areas of unmet need. I'm thinking of the autism area, I'm thinking of First Nations, and I'm thinking of some of the schools that specialize in helping families and students with special needs – the Calgary Academy comes to mind – and learning disabilities that are uniquely placed to provide supports and success for some of these young people, the Alternative high in Calgary. Those are the ones I know to some extent. The fact that they are receiving 3 per cent of the budget for education is a significant acknowledgement that it's not a huge part of our public system.

At the same time, if there are, I guess, what I would call exclusive criteria, if there are elite opportunities that are only afforded to those with substantial income and special interests, I think they do merit looking at from the point of view of whether public funding should be enhancing those elite activities. And I'm thinking of athletics and art in some cases.

The position of our caucus and our party has been that, ultimately, we want to move innovation and the essential supports for all young people and their families into the public system, incorporating the best of what's there and ensuring that all students have access to at least the fundamentals, whether they're disabled or whether they have specific learning problems, that those be part and parcel of our public system and that over time integrating back into the public system would allow them to have full public funding. That would be the incentive for them to return or, actually, not to return but, in some cases, to come into the public system. There would be a greater accessibility for some of these areas, there would be innovation, and it would be a win-win for both the public system and the choices issue, which I think we all value.

With that in mind, I guess, I'm kind of indicating that while there are indications for funding for special schools, especially where there are unique needs, then I can see that we need to provide support for that to ensure that especially those who are marginalized get the support they need. On the other hand, where we have made innovation in some of the charter schools and, we understand, some

new opportunities, we want them to be included into the public system. We can consider full public funding for those subject to some years of transitioning back into the public system and meeting the inclusion criteria, the issues around normalizing some of their programming, and with the incentive that they would be fully funded by following the full school curriculum and standards, that make them more accessible in the public system.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize Drayton Valley-Devon, followed by Sherwood Park if there's time.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I realize the time is fast approaching, so I'll try and make my remarks maybe a little more abbreviated than I would have liked to. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Lougheed for sharing that letter with us from that young lady. Impressive.

I guess what I would argue and suggest today, Madam Speaker, is that whatever education system we have in place, it needs to be one that is flexible enough to be able to meet the needs of Alberta students. I would argue that that means we need to embrace the educational principles and values that we have got in this province, that are enshrined in law, and that we need to recognize the diversity that is in this province when it comes to the people of this province and, therefore, the need for educational diversity within this province.

We spent quite a bit of time talking about the amendment, and with that opportunity we talked a little bit about the large numbers of immigrants that were coming into Alberta and the need for diversity in our education because of that. Other colleagues in this House have spoken to the needs of a diverse population and autism and other educational needs that are going to need diversity in education.

5:50

I believe that we do need to get down to some basic principles, though, what we believe we want our society to be like. One of the things that I think is one of our huge strengths in Alberta is that we're not divided by race or language or religion. We don't identify through those things solely; rather, we have a civic sense of nationalism. That civic sense of nationalism has brought us to combine and to unite around a set of values and principles, and one of those is the value of freedom, the freedom to choose how we're going to raise our kids, the value of freedom of religion, how we're going to raise our families in the faith values that we choose to have. I believe that whatever education system we have, it needs to be surrounded and encompassed by a mature understanding of freedom, a freedom that allows us to be able to speak our conscience, to raise our family, to pursue our faith, but to do so within the context of a community.

Now, I guess that's one of the things that I would – and I think maybe it's quibbling here a little bit with your motion there, but you say: "allowing" parents. It's "allowing parents the choice of educational delivery for their children." I'm not sure that I would use that word only because I believe that it's the parents' choice, that it comes from the parents first and not from the state. But maybe that's just quibbling.

The Wildrose Party and this member are going to be very glad to support this motion and to support it because we believe in that vision of Alberta and that vision of education, a vision that will allow for public schools and Catholic schools, a vision that will allow for home education and charter schools and alternative programs and independent schools all in order to meet the educational needs of our children. You know, these are important

values, so I was very pleased to hear members from the government side and the hon. Minister of Education stand up today and support this vision of education and of diversity and the funding for that.

Now, in all of those things – don't get me wrong. As a former public school teacher I see the value in a public system of education, and Alberta has an amazing public system that challenges and engages students. I've seen the excellence that public education can provide for students as they engage in their learning, but I also want to recognize that the other streams of education, the diversity of education that we have, also can produce excellence. While I'm proud of the great work that we've done in a public system of education, whether that's separate or whether that's public, I absolutely recognize and believe that we should continue to fund the excellence that occurs in all of our educational delivery models. One size does not fit all, it's been said, and I believe that in Alberta we have an educational delivery system that's very diverse, and it's one of our strengths.

So as we pursue a vision of education, I guess I would just leave with these comments. I would urge all of us in this House to support Motion 504 because we should not be unnecessarily restricting Albertans' educational options. Rather, where parents and students want an educational option, where there's enough demand for that educational option, where constitutionally we are directed to provide that educational option, where the educational option can be delivered in a manner where learning occurs in a safe and caring environment, then the government, I believe, has an obligation to both pay for and to allow and provide for that educational option.

This motion calls us to stay committed to these objectives and to these values. It will receive my support today. Thank you very much.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, I like to request unanimous consent of the House to go to one-minute bells if I may.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to rise to support the motion. Our government supports the rights of parents when it comes to making choices about their child's education. As a former school trustee it's always a pleasure for me to meet trustees, educators, teachers, and parents involved in education. This week is Education Week, and I feel fortunate to be able to celebrate the week with a few schools in my constituency. I think it's very fitting that MLA for a Day is during this week.

In my constituency parents have a large number of choices for their children. We have schools such as Woodbridge school, that is part of the Elk Island public board; St. Theresa, which is in Elk Island Catholic board; New Horizons, which is a charter school for gifted children. This fall they will be joined by the Sherwood Park École francophone, who will share space with New Horizons charter school. Francophone parents who live in the Fort Saskatchewan and Strathcona county areas now have the possibility of sending their children to a school where they will be taught in French. The school will be named after Senator Claudette Tardif and her husband, Denis. Both have contributed greatly to the support for francophone school boards in Alberta. There is also a large number of parents who home-school their children and who belong to a number of different home-school boards.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to the unanimous consent granted earlier this afternoon, I will now turn to the Member for Calgary-Hays to close debate.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just to review here, we are debating Motion 504, which I first moved two weeks ago, and I'd like to read it again into the record.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to affirm its commitment to allowing parents the choice of educational delivery for their children, including home, charter, private, francophone, separate, or public education programs.

Madam Speaker, it's consistent with the United Nations charter, article 26, section (3), that reads: "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children."

The purpose of the motion is to have the government confirm what they're already doing. I'm asking the government to give parents the assurance that choice will remain in education, assurance that education will not go backwards in Alberta and that students can continue to benefit from the many options of educational delivery currently available. Alberta has one of the best education systems in the world, and the PC caucus encourages this government to keep it that way.

Choice in education, including home, charter, private, francophone, separate, or public education programs, is about meeting the needs and interests of children, the most important people that we're talking about here, so that they can reach their full potential. Everybody should have equality of opportunity. They don't always have equality of results, but education fit to each child is going to give each child as close as you can get to that equality of opportunity. All children deserve that, Madam Speaker. The choice for parents is to decide which school is best for them. I have to say that I have experience in my life in most of these choices: in private schools, charter schools, separate schools, and public schools. They all have their place. They all belong. They all look after children. This motion encourages the government to ensure stable and permanent access to that choice in education.

I thank the government for withdrawing their amendment. I think that is a victory today for Alberta children and parents. Sometimes, Madam Speaker, some of these people need to fight for what is right. I think this is a case where that happened. My grandchildren will benefit. I believe everybody's children and grandchildren will benefit not only now but in generations to come. Parents and only parents are best to decide for their children. Of course, when their children are looked after by someone else, the one that tucks them into bed at night is probably the one that loves them the most and is most suited to make these decisions about how they're educated.

I have to say that there's been an outpouring of support from parents across Alberta on this particular motion. There are lessons to be learned about this whole process, and this will be talked about for a long time, but that does not diminish the importance of what we're going to do today. The minister said that he's proud of the education system. I agree with the minister. This is important because kids matter.

Albertans have created a system that is largely better than other provinces' in Canada because Albertans told their government that sometimes their kids need better choices. Sometimes their kids need extra services. The hon. Liberal member talked about special-needs kids or kids that might have autism. Sometimes they need special care. Sometimes kids are actually smarter than other kids, and they need special care for that so that they can reach their highest potential. That is what choice does. It provides kids with a good experience. It provides them with the best chance to reach their full potential as human beings.

6:00

Now, I am glad the government has decided to support parental choice, or at least that's my understanding, and I thank them for that. Madam Speaker, this is something so fundamental – so very

fundamental – to the future of Alberta. Of course, it can't be forgotten that it's essential that all Alberta schools regardless of the type are safe, caring, welcoming places for all students regardless of who those students are: race, creed, colour, religion, sexual orientation, whatever.

Madam Speaker, I would encourage all members of the House to support this motion, and should you do so, you'll have my heartfelt thanks and, more importantly, those of the parents.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 504 carried unanimously]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 6:01 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Ganley	Payne
Anderson, S.	Gotfried	Piquette
Anderson, W.	Gray	Pitt
Barnes	Hanson	Renaud
Carlier	Hinkley	Rodney
Carson	Horne	Rosendahl
Ceci	Hunter	Sabir
Clark	Kazim	Schneider
Connolly	Larivee	Schreiner

Coolahan	Littlewood	Smith
Cooper	Loewen	Starke
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Stier
Cyr	MacIntyre	Strankman
Dach	Malkinson	Sucha
Dang	Mason	Swann
Drysdale	McIver	Sweet
Eggen	McKitrick	Taylor
Ellis	McLean	Turner
Feehan	McPherson	Westhead
Fildebrandt	Miller	Woollard
Fitzpatrick	Panda	

Totals: For – 62 Against – 0

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 carried unanimously]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to the Budget 2016 main estimates schedule the Assembly now stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

The legislative policy committees will convene this evening at 7 p.m. for consideration of the main estimates. Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for Labour in the Grassland Room. Families and Communities will consider the estimates for Justice and Solicitor General in the Foothills Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:06 p.m.]

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