



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 9, 2016

Day 24

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 9, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us reflect each in our own way. If you would bow your heads. The events in our province these past several days serve to remind us of both our weaknesses and our strengths. In spite of our technology and our wealth we recognize that sometimes we are vulnerable to the power of nature. The events also serve as a reminder of the strength our fellow Canadians show and give us through their compassion, their caring, and their support. It is our strength gained by our collective action as Canadians that will ultimately guide us through this very difficult time in our province.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark, and I invite all participants to sing in the language of their choice.

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: Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me today to welcome one of the first classes that I've had the pleasure of introducing in this House in my 12 years in the Legislature, the most politically active class I've ever known. It happens to have two of my grandsons in it. I don't know why they're so interested in politics. I hasten to add that this group has also raised \$5,000 in the last week for Fort McMurray. I'd like to introduce my two grandsons Koen Archuleta and Kace Archuleta. Please stand and be recognized. They're already famous. In the case of Koen it's for his style and his dancing. Kace is famous for his competitive sports.

I'd also like to introduce teachers and support staff: the principal, Sandra Trumper; the educational assistant, Mavis Clark; their teacher, Anne MacQuarrie; and parents and helpers Katharina Doyle, Susan Cress, Megan Stoddart, and Robyn Wanner. All the students of the grade 6 class from Sunnyside school please stand up.

The Speaker: Welcome.

If the House would indulge me, the \$5,000 was only achieved by means of a co-operative venture. I'd also like to particularly introduce my daughter Robyn and my grandson Xavier, who is in the same class.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a grade 6 class from John Barnett school in the Edmonton-Manning constituency. With them today is Ms Peggy

Wright, one of our dear friends and also a social justice advocate within our community, as well as parents Christine Waggoner, Brittney Rosborough, Pattie Sidlick. If I could ask all the students to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the staff, the parents, and the students of the grade 6 class at Blessed Sacrament school in my hometown of Wainwright. You know, the reason I'm really pleased and excited to introduce them is that this school was one of the schools that I taught in way back when, when I used to teach, back in 1994, in fact. So I hold this school close and dear to my heart. Would the people rise as I call out their names: Mr. Martel, Mrs. Degenhardt, Mrs. Laferriere, Mr. Morris, and the grade 6 class, please. Would the Assembly help me in welcoming them with the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to introduce to you and through you the NDP caucus director of outreach, Garrett Spelliscy. Garrett brought his mom, Nancy Spelliscy, with him today in honour of Mother's Day. I would ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce a home-school group from the awesome constituency of Airdrie. The only thing that would make them more awesome is if they were, of course, from the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. They are some very good friends of ours, and they are seated in the gallery: Julia Schoenroth, Cara Schoenroth, Everett Schoenroth, Allayna Schoenroth, and Saydee Schoenroth. They are fabulous community members. In fact, Julia is the lead organizer of a home-school group, that meets every Wednesday morning at the Crossfield Baptist church, called Classical Conversations, where 11 home-schooling families with 66 children come together and join in fellowship. I invite you to welcome them here to the Assembly today.

The Speaker: Are there any other guests for today? The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a couple of special people with the John Barnett school group. Most may know her as the nice lunch lady, but I know her as my beautiful sister Christine Renaud Waggoner and her daughter Beth Waggoner. If they could please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

1:40

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Fort McMurray and Area Wildfire Update

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to provide an update on the wildfire situation in northeastern Alberta.

Our hearts go out to the residents evacuated by the wildfires. Fort McMurray, Anzac, Gregoire Lake Estates, and Fort McMurray First Nation remain under mandatory evacuation orders. Our focus remains centred on ensuring the safety of people, that they're safely evacuated, and that they receive the services that they need.

There is some welcome news today, Mr. Speaker. There was no significant growth of the fire overnight. It currently stands at 162,000 hectares. Fire conditions remain extreme, although the weather is beginning to give us a reprieve. The current forecast indicates a high of 11 degrees Celsius today, 40 per cent humidity. Winds will remain a factor at 20 kilometres per hour toward the northwest, gusting up to 40 kilometres per hour. Heavy smoke remains a concern, and we are monitoring air quality closely to ensure our first responders are safe. There are more than 500 firefighters bravely battling the blaze along with 20 helicopters, 15 air tankers, and many pieces of heavy equipment.

All evacuees are urged to register with the Red Cross no matter where you are. Please visit redcross.ca to register if you haven't already. As of this morning approximately 40,000 households have registered with the Red Cross. This will ensure that evacuees have access to the assistance that they need. There are currently 12 reception centres open within Alberta. As always, the best place to go for the most up-to-date information is emergency.alberta.ca.

As you know, the Premier, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and Mayor Melissa Blake are in Fort McMurray today to inspect the damage and to meet with the emergency management experts on the ground. Some media will also have access, supported by emergency services. Please note that it is still unsafe for anyone who is not a first responder to be inside the barricades. There will be some dramatic damage coming up this afternoon, and mental health supports are available for anyone who needs them. Co-ordinated damage assessments are happening today, and we are ensuring that vital emergency services and utilities are back online and operating safely as soon as possible.

It's important to note that there is no date yet when residents can return, but it will not be in the coming days. There will be a great deal of work to be done to make sure that our city is safe, for the health of the people, to live in again. Emergency services are working around the clock to begin the work needed to make this city safe again, but it will take time. I understand that this is difficult to hear, but the safety of Fort McMurray residents must remain our top priority.

The response to this massive wildfire from Albertans and Canadians has been incredible. The generosity continues to pour into the Red Cross, with donations of \$54 million so far. The Premier will meet with industry leaders tomorrow, and we are in daily communication with industry throughout the Provincial Operations Centre. They have played an integral role in our emergency response efforts so far, especially with their assistance in housing and evacuating thousands of people who fled to the north of Fort McMurray. We've already begun operations about what will be required to revamp their operations and get them back up.

Government of Alberta ministries are supporting emergency response efforts to address the needs of evacuated residents in a number of ways. Cabinet has authorized \$200 million in immediate disaster recovery program funding, and we will revise this number as needed. Our government will provide emergency financial assistance for evacuees in the form of preloaded debit cards. Adults will receive \$1,250 and another \$500 for every dependant. We are working hard to begin distributing the assistance, hopefully, by mid this week. Due to the scale and the logistics of this issue we will be asking people who are not in immediate need, who do not need to claim these funds right away, to please hold off. This will allow us to ensure that those who need it most can have it first. We will be

releasing further details on how these cards will be distributed when that becomes available.

We will be hosting several town hall teleconference meetings over the next week to answer questions directly from the affected residents. These town hall events will be an opportunity to discuss the challenges facing our province and specifically the residents of Fort McMurray. We will be reaching out to evacuees to participate, and invitees will have a chance to ask questions throughout the calls. There will be several town hall teleconference events, and I encourage every Fort McMurray resident to take advantage of the opportunities to listen and to participate. These calls will happen tonight, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings of this week. Evacuees should register with the Red Cross to ensure that they receive the details of these calls.

If evacuees left behind documents such as drivers' licences or ID cards, new cards can be issued free of charge at a registry agent.

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry continues to work closely with the RCMP and the SPCA to address reports from evacuees asking for help with the pets that they had to leave behind when they fled so quickly. The SPCA has begun transporting pets to Edmonton, with about 200 arriving late yesterday. They will contact pet owners who have registered with them in the coming days. Alberta Health Services has mental health support staff at the evacuation reception centres in Lac La Biche, here at Northlands, SAIT, University of Calgary, Ambrose University in Calgary, St. Paul, and the Suncor Firebag site north of Fort McMurray. A government-wide wildfire recovery task force has been established to help with the recovery from this devastating wildfire.

Mr. Speaker, we know that this is a very difficult time for many Albertans, especially given that there are so many unknowns. I want to thank all of the first responders, everyone who has donated, and everyone who has offered to help the evacuees. We will continue to support you now and in the weeks and months ahead, and I know that the Premier will have further updates from the ground in Fort McMurray later this afternoon.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

Members' Statements

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

Fort McMurray and Area Wildfire Relief

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in this House to recognize all the amazing people from across this province – those from Fort McMurray, first of all; those in Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, which I have the great privilege to represent; our friends, families, and neighbours in Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills – and, indeed, all of those across the country who have stood up in a time of desperate urgency to do what needs to be done without a thought to cost or inconvenience. In the midst of tragedy they have shown just what Albertans are made of, and it is hard stuff indeed, save for one part, their hearts.

I think it's impossible to overstate the contribution of first responders who have overseen the largest fire evacuation in Alberta's history under incredibly difficult conditions. It is the amazing work and expertise of first responders, their planning, and the swift and competent action of emergency services that made this possible.

I would like to thank all the unsung heroes in this emergency as well. It is amazing and inspiring how people can be when they see a clear and urgent need and they have the means to help. Without the selfless actions of so many who stood up without waiting to be

asked, I have no doubt that things would have turned out much, much worse. During this time I've had the privilege of meeting and speaking with hundreds of evacuees, and for the vast majority of them I think the most apt description would be grace under pressure.

I know I can safely speak for all the volunteers along the way when I say that our doing our own bit to help is no burden at all but an honour that we will treasure for the rest of our lives. I'm honoured beyond words to represent such incredible people as those you will find in all the communities along the way that saw the need to help and did so without question. To all of the individuals and organizations supporting your fellow Albertans through this tragedy: thank you; you make us all proud.

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

Fort McMurray and Area Wildfire Relief

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The resiliency of our province in facing fires over the past week has had me more proud to be an Albertan than I was before. Families, communities, charities, and businesses from across the province have opened their arms, looking for ways to help those who have been touched by this crisis. The influx of donations is truly heartening. I was proud to be a part of a fundraiser last Friday that raised \$15,000 for the Red Cross. This story isn't unique. All across our great province and across Canada the people are doing the same.

First responders continue to work tirelessly to protect communities and restrain this wildfire. When tens of thousands are fleeing Fort McMurray, these brave men and women ran towards the disaster. Without their help, expertise, and calm resolve I can't imagine where we would be today, and my thoughts and prayers and profound thanks go out to them. I was particularly touched this weekend to see the first responders taking time to brighten the days of mothers yesterday by handing out flowers. Stories like these show that in our times of greatest need Albertans are at their best.

1:50

I continue to be inspired by all those who are offering a hug, encouraging words, and a shoulder to cry on during this crisis, including the two Wildrose MLAs from Fort McMurray. Their leadership is exemplary.

Tens of thousands have lost so much but continue to be a source of strength, resilience, and pride. No one is alone as we go through this journey together. So many of my former colleagues in the energy sector do not know what tomorrow will bring, but we'll face it together head-on. We will rebuild, and we'll continue to provide a helping hand to those who need it most.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Fort McMurray Home Reconstruction

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the last number of days sympathies have rolled in for the people of Fort McMurray from across Alberta, Canada, and indeed the world. For tens of thousands of men, women, and children who were forced to flee their homes, these words have provided peace during some of their darkest days. But with true Alberta spirit these families are eager to get back and rebuild their homes and live bigger, better, and stronger. To the Premier: what will the process be to inspect and assess homes in

Fort McMurray for possible rehabilitation, and what is your anticipated timeline for this to happen, please?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our priority is, of course, ensuring that all Albertans are safe. Our fire crews have been working hard to save the downtown and as much as possible of the residential neighbourhoods. I'm so proud of the firefighters and the first responders for their excellent work in battling this fire; we all are. We know that they are doing everything they can to ensure that they have the necessary resources to address this effort.

In terms of giving a timeline, it really is going to be an evidence-based decision. I'm not going to stand in this House and give a deadline. Unfortunately, it won't be in the immediate, short-term, coming days. We need to make sure that the air is safe, the water is safe, the power is on, and the buildings are safe.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I know it's early, but residents want to start planning for the future now. Following the 2013 flooding that devastated parts of southern Alberta, the government issued sole-source contracts to accelerate the inspection and demolition of homes that were beyond repair. It's important for this government to procure resources now to begin reconstruction efforts given the long road to recovery ahead for these families. To the Premier again: has this government begun the process of awarding inspection and/or demolition contracts, and if so, what procurement methods are being used to do this, please?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We know that evacuees want to go home, and we want that for them, too, but we will not put them at risk in the short term. Right now the city is not safe for people. The water is not drinkable. There are limited supplies, and much of the city is without power. These things need to be addressed and dealt with before we can move forward with other steps around remediation. But I want to be very clear that it will not be safe in the coming days. When it is safe, we will make sure that we let everyone know. But please know that it is important that the mandatory evacuation is still in place, and that's because it's not safe.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, thank you. This government should be doing everything it can to expedite the return of affected Albertans to their homes. Insurance companies are already encouraging fire victims to begin the claims process as soon as they are able. Residents are eager to put on their tool belts and rebuild their communities. Following the 2013 floods, again, permits were required for any repairs but only after approvals were given by inspectors. Despite what was just said by the minister, can the Premier or the minister please provide details as to, firstly, how property owners should proceed to apply to begin the inspection and approval process, and . . .

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that people want to get home; we want them to be able to go home, too. At this point it's premature to be able to draw those steps. We still need to make sure that emergency housing is in place. We need to

move forward with short-term housing. It will take time. This is a disaster of extensive magnitude, and it is absolutely not safe to begin planning those steps for individuals at this point. Government is doing everything to get the right resources lined up, including getting emergency relief funds into the hands of the families to address their short-term needs. I know we want to think long-term, but at this point we aren't able to share those messages publicly.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Deputy Premier.
The Member for Airdrie.

Emergency Funding for Wildfire Evacuees

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, the amount of time that the people of Fort McMurray had to flee their homes was as little as 30 seconds. During this time many were unable to gather up precious mementos, let alone their wallets. Now, six days after the mandatory evacuation was issued, many continue to not have identification, cash, credit or debit cards. With over \$55 million being donated to the Red Cross by generous Canadians who want to help, people are concerned about the delay in getting the funds to the evacuees and want to know how this money is being used. How can we ensure that this money is getting to where it is needed most?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. The generosity of Albertans, of Canadians, of people from around the world in going to redcross.ca and making contributions is something we are all incredibly proud of. In terms of getting those resources into the hands of those who need them most, certainly, the evacuation centres have been one of the central hubs. As well we are encouraging people to register on redcross.ca so that we know that they are safe and so we can get those transitional funds into their hands. We are hopeful that we will be able to begin doing that mid-week, so in the next couple of days. Certainly, this is something that we should be proud of, our generosity, and making sure that we get . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

Mrs. Pitt: As Albertans, unfortunately, know, this is not the first natural disaster that our province has had to face. During the 2013 floods in southern Alberta it took five days for the previous government to begin to issue emergency funding debit cards. By this time Wednesday, when the week rolls around and details of the plan are announced, a full eight days will have passed since the people of Fort McMurray were forced to flee their homes. This discrepancy is leading to questions of why the NDP government is taking longer to allocate these much-needed funds. To the minister: why the delay for these crucial cards?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We have certainly been working very quickly. Our public service has worked around the clock, and we are very grateful for their dedication. We know that the number of evacuees in this situation is extreme; 80,000 individuals is a very large number. We want to make sure that it's rolled out in a way that provides accountability and also easy access for those who most need the funds. We're hopeful that the money will be able to make its way into their hands in the coming days.

Again, the donations of clothes, of other necessities have been very much appreciated.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's most vulnerable are who I am particularly worried about during this crisis. Even if they were able to bring along their wallets when fleeing their houses, it doesn't mean that there is money in the bank account or that they had insurance for where they lived. As you can imagine, these individuals are being forced to make heart-wrenching decisions about how to carry on while faced with this hardship. Will the minister accelerate the process for the provision of emergency funds to not leave these vulnerable Albertans in the lurch?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, everyone is working as quickly as is physically possible to get these resources into the hands of those who most need them. In terms of addressing the needs of the most vulnerable, as I mentioned in my introductory update, if you do not need the resources immediately, please wait so those who are most in need have access to the funds as quickly as possible. Addressing the needs of everyone is certainly a priority for us. Again, register with redcross.ca so we can assess needs and help to address them in a timely fashion.

Thank you.

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

Fort McMurray Energy Industry Wildfire Recovery

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These fires are having a real human impact for the people of Fort McMurray and right across the province. It's a reminder of how grateful we are to Fort McMurray and our energy sector for the prosperity provided not just to Alberta but to all of Canada. People know production has been cut by a million barrels a day, and people want to rebuild their neighbourhoods and their town as the economic engine of Canada. What timelines can the Premier give for when these people can get back home, back to work, and what resources will be there for them?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we know, Fort McMurray was already facing a once-in-a-generation economic slump due to the decline in the price of oil. Of course, this fire is compounding the pain faced by Alberta families and businesses, especially those in Fort McMurray. The challenges that we face are significant, but the people of Fort McMurray are tough and resilient, and Albertans are behind them. We will stand with them every step of the way as they continue to rebuild. Tomorrow the Minister of Energy and the Premier will be meeting with industry to discuss next steps.

Mrs. Aheer: We know the economic impact of these fires is already being felt far and wide here in Alberta and across Canada. This fire has meant for the people of Fort McMurray and across Alberta even worse news. We're already hearing stories of workers and contractors in all parts of the province losing work connected to the production losses in the oil sands. Albertans expect their government to have a plan to aggressively attract investment back to Alberta once Fort McMurray is back up and running. Does the government have a plan, and if so, when can Albertans expect that announcement?

2:00

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. Certainly, ensuring safety, as I've mentioned earlier, is the top priority for those who live in the community and those who work there as well. Initial reports about the damage to oil sands facilities have actually been quite encouraging – it has been very minimal – but we want to hear from the experts about the impact of the fire as well.

We have a cabinet task force that's already at work to determine how we can get the community rebuilt, to recover and emerge stronger than ever, Mr. Speaker. We will learn from the work that has happened in recent recovery efforts both in Slave Lake and for the Calgary flood, but we're certainly working with families, with individuals, and with industry to try to get things back up as quickly as possible.

Mrs. Aheer: Postmedia today tells a story of Tenille Tellman, a self-employed contractor who did not pay employment insurance and doesn't qualify for benefits. Right now she's with a family in Medicine Hat. We want to make sure that people like Tenille not only can survive but are provided assurances that Fort McMurray will be stronger than ever once the fires stop. What is the province doing to make sure that people like Tenille are taken care of and that Fort McMurray will get the full support from all levels of government to bounce back?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, you've heard a great deal from the provincial and federal governments, but also I need to commend our municipalities from across Alberta for really stepping up to help during this difficult time of transition. It's truly exceptional and a heartwarming example of the good citizenship that our municipalities show to one another. We have a great sense of gratitude, as do all members of this Assembly. Of course, the priority is to ensure safety but also to get people back up and working as quickly as possible. We will continue to convey what the infrastructure needs are to our federal partners as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Minimum Wage

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in estimates the Labour minister agreed that she knew that there are about equal numbers of research studies that don't support an increased minimum wage and of those studies that do. Of course, a minimum wage policy with a 50-50 chance of destroying jobs for up to 300,000 Albertans, including many in the Fort McMurray area, is something that Albertans would be concerned about. To the Labour minister: why did you choose to pay attention to the evidence saying that a \$15 minimum wage was good and ignore the evidence saying that it's not good, particularly at this time, when all of Alberta . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has been clear in supporting a phase-in of a \$15 minimum wage. The opposition does like to speculate about some of the data around minimum wage, but here in Alberta nearly 1 in 3 who access the food bank are working people according to those who run the food banks in Canada. Why are they going to the food bank? Because they're using their income to pay rent, telephone, transportation, and other essentials of living, and this is wrong. We believe that all Albertans

should be able to support their families without having to go to the food bank.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has already agreed that a minimum wage won't keep people out of the food bank. Those are not living-wage jobs. That's a different thing.

In estimates the minister also could not tell us how the government is planning on addressing the brain drain of qualified workers leaving Alberta. Of course, a big part of that brain drain is people from the Fort McMurray area that work in technical fields, Mr. Speaker. To the Labour minister again: in case and when the day comes when Albertans are able to create jobs, what will the minister do to stop the brain drain and keep those people here, again including Fort McMurray, so that they can fill the jobs when they open up again?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are very aware of the challenging times that we are facing here in Alberta right now given the low global price of oil. We are supporting our workers by providing training opportunities as well as engagements to allow them to upgrade their skills so that they will be able to stay here in Alberta and contribute productively to our economy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also in estimates last week the Labour minister, when asked about costs, said, and I quote: it is the Finance and Health ministers' goal to spend less, potentially. So in this time, again, when the economy is bad and people in Fort McMurray are feeling it more than anything else, I have to ask the Finance minister: what are your government's plans to spend less on labour? Which people will you not employ? Which ones will you pay less and in which departments?

Mr. Ceci: I think that I've stood up in this House before and I've talked about the different initiatives that are turning down the tap on expenditures for wages. All members of the Legislature have taken a freeze on their salaries; political staff have as well. Management has taken a two-year freeze and a grid movement freeze. We're also looking at – there'll be a bill coming in later that looks at the agencies, boards, and commissions and asks them to look at the compensations. We have negotiations that'll be taking place at the negotiation table with all of our unionized people, and we're looking for improvements there, recognizing the environment.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Mental Health Services for Wildfire Evacuees and First Responders

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All of us in this House are acutely aware of the skill, compassion, and courage of our emergency responders and of all the people in Fort McMurray throughout the hot, raging inferno. Also inspiring are the thousands of ordinary Albertans who've given time and money to support their neighbours. But mental health and supports for mental health are an ongoing concern. To the minister: how in a mental health system unable now to meet the needs of the population is the province planning to see the needs of these people . . .

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Certainly, I appreciate his dedication and commitment to the mental health and wellness both of the evacuees as well as the first responders. Certainly, when I was at the Western Premiers' Conference just late last week, everyone wants to help us, not just the western Premiers, but Canadians want to help us. Finding ways that they might be able to provide some support in the days, weeks, and months ahead is certainly something that they're interested in supporting us with. It will be about triaging and making sure that we get the resources where they most need to be. Again, please register at redcross.ca.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, we're talking about resources that are already insufficient. Where are we going to get new resources, and are we committed to new resources? Given that first responders in Fort McMurray have unique trauma associated with some of them leaving their families at the very time when their families need them the most, what new resources, including qualified trauma specialists, will be available?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there have been discussions with Alberta Health Services about the resources that are available currently, what the response was in some of the other natural disasters that we've dealt with recently, how those might be able to apply as well as ways that we might be able to collaborate with the federal government as well to release some resources. For example, the trauma that some of our first responders are dealing with is unique in this situation, but it happens on a regular basis as well with the armed forces, so we're certainly in conversation about ways that we might be able to use their expertise as we move forward.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the concerns about the lack of trained trauma counsellors in the province for PTSD, including our WCB, the Workers' Compensation Board, and its capacity to deal with increased numbers of first responders, can the minister tell this House what new staff and resources will be provided for this extensive population of traumatized people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Certainly, the chief medical officer of health is an instrumental part of making sure that we move forward with evidence-based decisions, looking at what the needs are here in Alberta and also the best practices in other jurisdictions. I appreciate the suggestions that have been offered by the member opposite, and I'll certainly have an open line of communication, but clearly we will be caring for the heroes who are caring for us today in the days ahead as well.

Thank you.

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

School Accommodation of Wildfire-affected Students

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fires in Fort McMurray have impacted thousands of students, including those nearing graduation from high school. These students were getting ready to

move on to postsecondary institutions to further their studies or to begin their careers in the Alberta workforce. To the Minister of Education: what is being done to accommodate our grade 12 students specifically?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the member for the question. These students and all other grades, for that matter, are now able to register with school boards in the area where they've relocated. We've also seen many students registering in classes in Edmonton, Calgary, St. Paul, Lac La Biche, and many other school boards across the province. For grade 12 we will be working with our school boards and postsecondary partners to ensure that they can finish up their classes, and we'll make provisions around grade 12 diplomas to make sure that they are accommodated as well.

Thank you.

2:10

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Luff: Thank you. To the same minister. You just mentioned the diploma exams. What are the specific arrangements that are being made when it comes to those tests?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are about 900 grade 11 and grade 12 students in the Fort McMurray area that signed up to write diploma exams. All of these students displaced by fire will be granted an exception to diploma exams if they choose to do so. Displaced students wishing to write the diplomas have the opportunity to do so at the school where they register or at testing centres in Calgary or Edmonton. Alberta Education will be there to administer as well tests outside the major centres. We will support our students and find solutions that will work for all of them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Luff: Thank you. To the same minister: given the need to ensure stability for our high school students, will being exempted from the diploma exams have an impact on these students' applications to postsecondary?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you once again for the question. Students who opt to not write the diploma exams will take their grade awarded in the classroom and can use that to apply to postsecondary institutions. This makes sense for what has happened, Mr. Speaker. I'm communicating our plans to forward diploma exams to all our school boards and postsecondary partners today, and we will work in collaboration with them to ensure that our students are supported during this difficult time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Support for Wildfire-affected Albertans

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Alberta Works locations were already overwhelmed in the recent months by Albertans seeking assistance due to the economic downturn. In recent months there have already been media reports of long lineups and overwhelmed staff needing to turn Albertans away. What is the current government doing to make sure that Alberta Works

locations are prepared to handle the influx of displaced Albertans that may be seeking assistance as a result of this wildfire?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Member, for the question. At Alberta Works centres we are trying our best to make sure that Albertans are supported in this time of need. Five Alberta Works sites in the north-central region were open on Saturday, May 7, to accommodate the influx of Albertans. We are increasing our capacity by adding more staff and by extending the hours to make sure that Albertans have the supports they need.

Thank you.

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, given that one of the responsibilities of Alberta Works is to provide front-line employment services and career resources to unemployed Albertans and given that many Albertans in Fort McMurray have lost long-time places of employment in addition to their homes, between Alberta Labour and Human Services what is the current government doing to increase the availability of employment services and career resources for those who have been displaced by this wildfire?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Member, for the question. At this time the government's priority remains the safety of Albertans and their immediate needs. Starting on Wednesday, hopefully, we will be providing \$1,250 per head and \$500 per dependant child for their immediate needs. And once circumstances get better, we will work with the evacuees to make sure that their other needs, their employment needs and their long-term needs, are met as well.

Thank you.

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, given that another responsibility of Alberta Works is to help Albertans with low incomes cover basic living costs and given that many low-income and elderly Albertans are entirely displaced from their homes as a result of this devastating wildfire, can the current government update the House on how they will be helping low-income Albertans from Fort McMurray that have been evacuated and what resources are being made available at this time?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Certainly, we are addressing the needs. One of the difficulties in being able to give a concrete response to the question is that still not everyone is registered. So we are encouraging everyone every day, no matter where you're living or what your needs are, to register so that we know that you're safe, so we can assess what your needs are today but also for the shorter term and longer term planning for the individual families, for the workers, and for the community so that it can continue to move forward in a way – we have Albertans' backs, and we will continue to do so as we move forward.

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

Public Safety in Fort McMurray

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The disaster in Fort McMurray involves many moving parts, and a critical one relates to public safety and security. The police and other first responders performed a superb evacuation under some of the most challenging

circumstances in the history of our nation. However, the tens of thousands of Fort McMurray residents now hundreds of kilometres away from their homes are naturally apprehensive about the security of their property, especially when they hear rumours of looting. To the Solicitor General: has there been any looting in Fort McMurray, and what measures are being taken to ensure it will not occur?

Ms Hoffman: The first thing I want to say is how important it is that people do honour the mandatory evacuation notice so that the first responders on the ground can focus on the duties that they need to do the most. Obviously, they don't want to have to turn people away, so if you stay where you're safe, the first responders on the ground can focus on keeping your belongings safe. Certainly, we'll continue to move forward, and I'm sure the Solicitor General will address other details around rumours around that situation. But please honour the mandatory evacuation order.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the city is deemed secure right now due to the limited number of people gaining access to it because of the hazardous situation and given that as the evacuation is lifted and thousands of residents flow home, others, including voyeurs and criminals of opportunity, may travel to Fort McMurray, again to the Solicitor General: how will police provide for a quick and orderly return for anxious Fort McMurray residents while also ensuring criminals of opportunity do not have free rein to roam in a partially empty city?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the critical question. We know the residents of Fort McMurray are under an enormous amount of stress right now. They're worried about their homes and what's going to be there when they go back. Currently it's the case that the entire city is under a mandatory evacuation, and we have to ask that people respect that. The RCMP are doing some fantastic work in ensuring that they keep that city safe. They're keeping things patrolled and looking for pets and ensuring that people aren't in there when they shouldn't be. As time moves forward, they will be working on an orderly return plan, but I think the most important thing is to ask people to make sure that they're not going back prior to when they're asked to.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the RCMP have informed us that some residents did not leave the city and that this kind of behaviour can pose unnecessary risks to first responders and given that it also is understandable why some residents may choose not to flee their homes in a public emergency, especially if they do not truly understand the severity of the danger, and given that a crisis provides an opportunity to learn, again to the same minister: what are your plans for reviewing the evacuation to potentially improve response in a future crisis?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. Well, of course, the RCMP and all of us here in the province are always in the process of ensuring that we review an incident. We're not really at that stage yet. We're still at the stage where the fire is actively burning, but we certainly have learned a lot of lessons from things that have occurred in the past. I

want to assure people, you know, that the RCMP continue to be within the city, and they continue to patrol the city to keep everything safe. We again would like to ask people to ensure, even though we know they're stressed and even though we know they want to go home, they wait until the first responders are telling them that it's safe to go back.

The Speaker: The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Wildfire Prevention and Control

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Decades ago, before fire suppression practices were followed, only a small percentage of our forests were older than 75 years because wildfire was common and widespread. The boreal forest is now older and consequently much drier as it ages and is not replaced. This is what firefighters are dealing with in northern Alberta. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: is there or will there be an updated strategy to the province's wildfire management practices to account for this new reality?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The member might recall the Flat Top Complex, the Slave Lake fire in 2011. There was a large review done of that. I ordered and am accepting a report on a review of the fire season we had last year, which was a very large, bad season. We're expecting as well from this disaster an opportunity to do a review and, hopefully, learn something from it so we can prevent any such tragedy in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that in many instances these older and drier forests grow up and around many isolated urban centres and given that in the FireSmart strategy there are policies on the wildfire-urban interface that recommend such practices as construction of fuel- or firebreaks and the removal of volatile trees and the replanting of more fire-resistant species, again to the minister: are these recommendations and strategies being implemented in a timely fashion, and by whom?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. There were a lot of recommendations coming from various reviews, including the Flat Top Complex, that have been implemented over the years. We've had the opportunity over the past five years to implement many of them, to a cost of a hundred million dollars to implement a lot of those. It's important to note that Fort McMurray, even though they've gone through quite a disaster, had implemented a lot of that strategy from the FireSmart program. You know, it's too early to tell, but perhaps one of the reasons all people were able to evacuate was because of the FireSmart programs that were implemented. Again, we're looking forward to seeing what we can learn from this tragedy going forward.

Mr. Strankman: Given that on February 2 this government issued a tender for multiple aircraft, a water-skimming air tanker group, and on April 29 this government cancelled that same tender, will the hon. minister please provide an explanation and the supporting

documents to Albertans why this tender, opened February 2 of this year, was cancelled less than three months later?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. It's really important to note that we have a full complement of firefighters, air tankers, equipment on the wildfire fight that's happening in Fort McMurray as well as other places across the province. First and foremost, our number one, most important concern, of course, is the safety of Albertans and also the safety of their communities. Rest assured that we'll continue to do so whatever this season might have for us.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Calgary Ring Road Completion

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgaryans, especially in the constituency of Calgary-West, are getting anxious that recent comments from the Minister of Transportation stopping just short of a P3 moratorium may derail the southwest Calgary ring road. With three international consortiums having bid on the work, can the minister assure Calgary-West that the southwest ring road P3 is still a go, and please tell the House: when will the contract be awarded?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. I announced very early on that we would be proceeding with the southwest Calgary ring road in the form that was established, and we're expecting the bids from the consortium. It will be conducted as a P3. I should remind members that there is a seven-year time frame in which we have to complete that road, or the land reverts to the Tsuu T'ina Nation as per the agreement, so it's important that we waste no time whatsoever to make sure that that road is completed on . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that some NDP-supporting Calgary city councillors, not from Calgary-West, oppose the southwest Calgary ring road and given that some of these councillors have been vocal about redirecting the southwest Calgary ring road money to some other pet projects, can the minister assure the House that there was never ever a serious consideration that the funds for the southwest Calgary ring road be diverted?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given the minister's comments regarding P3s and whereas the west Calgary ring road has still not been put out to tender, P3 or otherwise, can Alberta's construction industry anticipate that the west Calgary ring road will be delivered by the traditional design/bid/build procurement method, and when does the minister anticipate the first of those tenders to hit the market?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the hon. member that I have made no decision with respect to the form of the contracts that will be let with respect to the west ring

road. I advise him to look in the capital plan because he will see that the west ring road is in the capital plan.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Job Creation

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Creating the environment for private investment and, hence, jobs is an integral part of good policy. The minister has confirmed that the private sector, not government, creates jobs. However, it is understood you can't instantly create 100,000 jobs. This happens one job at a time, as will undoubtedly be the case in Fort McMurray as well. To the minister of economic development: as no clear answers were received during estimates, could you outline for the House one specific initiative from your ministry that will help to create just 100 jobs, 1.1 per cent of your government's ambitious new jobs plan, as we diversify our economy?

Mr. Ceci: As the hon. member knows, our budget this year is focused on supporting families and communities. We're investing in infrastructure. That will create hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of jobs, obviously. We're diversifying the energy industry through the petrochemical diversification program. Again, once the tax credits start rolling there, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of jobs will be created, and we're supporting Alberta businesses by reducing their taxes in January 2017, so they will have more money to be able to create more jobs.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, if I can't get a hundred, I'm not sure I'm going to get a thousand more of those.

Given that jobs are created one initiative, one partnership, and one project at a time and given that all of these need to be initiated in a timely manner, built upon, and replicated to create results, to the Minister of Infrastructure: can you give us just one specific infrastructure project now being built anywhere in Alberta under the jobs plan, when it will be completed, and, more specifically, how many jobs it will create?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the southwest Calgary ring road is a project. We are now clearing the land. We have employed companies that are operated by the Tsuu T'ina Nation on some of that work. There is ordinance clearing. There is clearing of all the undergrowth and so on. I can assure the hon. member that hundreds of construction jobs are going to be created by that project in his own city.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for an initiative that was initiated by the Member for Calgary-Hays.

Given that increased export promotion and export growth are a clear path to job creation and given that trade and investment attraction is one of the few flat areas in the budget over the next three years despite an almost guaranteed return on investment for agriculture, forestry, and tourism, to the minister of economic development: how will you continue to compete in an ever-changing, highly competitive global marketplace without adequate financial resources allocated to export growth?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. I don't agree with: not adequate monies for export growth. Our government is committed to responsibly enhancing trade across provincial and national borders. We know

that trade of our world-class products and services means good mortgage-paying jobs in every corner of our province, and we'll always support trade that serves the interests of all Albertans.

The Speaker: The Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Culture and Tourism Support for Wildfire Evacuees

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past week has been very difficult for Albertans, especially for Fort McMurray families who have evacuated their homes with little to no belongings. Albertans have rallied together to support the affected communities. Given that additional supports are required, can the Minister of Culture and Tourism explain what the ministry is doing to help Fort McMurray families who were forced to flee their homes because of the devastating wildfires?

The Speaker: The Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism is doing our part by waiving fees to provincial historic sites and museums for those displaced by the wildfires, effective immediately. I'd also like to say that ministry staff have been part of the emergency task force and that approximately 80 of them have now come forward to volunteer on the recovery task force. Alberta Sport Connection has also loaned about 2,000 cots to the Northlands evacuation centre for use at the reception centre. I want to thank all the staff of the ministry who have come forward and helped.

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

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the update. We know that this is a tough time for Fort McMurray residents staying at evacuation centres, including families with children. To the same minister: why is it so important to waive these fees?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We know that this is a very stressful time that these families are facing right now. We wanted to provide the opportunity for them to have a bit of a distraction and to be able to leave the evacuation centres. We felt it was very important to do that at this time, and I am pleased to inform the House that since we made that announcement, we've had reports of families visiting the Royal Tyrrell, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, the Reynolds-Alberta Museum, the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre. I would encourage all of the families right now in the evacuation centres to take the opportunity to visit these places as it will be . . .

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

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the minister responsible for Northlands can you give this House an update on the work that they are doing to support the evacuees?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:30

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I can tell you that I'm very proud of the work that Northlands is doing. Like other evacuee centres, Northlands is

providing emergency lodging, food, clothing, entertainment, access to medical supplies, health services, access to insurance companies, and other services. The outpouring of support from Albertans has been tremendous. I want to personally thank all the front-line staff and the volunteers working at Northlands right now and at the evacuee centres across the province for stepping up and providing these very much needed services to Albertans who are hurting right now.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

School Construction in Irma

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The highest priority for the Battle River school division is the school in Irma. Built in the 1950s and last upgraded in the '80s, the heating and other systems are vintage at best. The ministry staff have said that the school is at end of life and is on the unfunded capital project list. I understand that funding is available for certain projects on that list for planning. Can the Minister of Infrastructure explain the criteria for having an unfunded project receive funds this year?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the school at Irma I'm going to have to look into that specific project and get back to the hon. member, but I want to assure him that we take into account the priorities that are set by school districts and the Department of Education in compiling the capital plan for schools.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you. Given that the school board has a template design for this school similar to the previous build that was done in this district and given that the village of Irma has raised funds to enhance the project to meet local needs – this school would be streamlined and efficient – to the same minister: is there a process whereby a shovel-ready project could be moved to the capital plan?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, a shovel-ready project is one of the criteria that we base the capital plan on, but we also have to take in many other factors, including the competing demands on the Infrastructure money. I point out to the House that when we expanded the capital plan and put out a call for projects of about 4 and a half billion dollars, we received over \$15 billion in requests. There are many, many important requests, more than we have cash for, so we have to set priorities. Sometimes communities . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Taylor: You have put it into priority because it's on your unfunded list.

Given the level of collaboration between the school board, the MD, and the village of Irma and given that they have raised over a million dollars to enhance the build to include a community centre and a gym for the village as part of the school design and since there is a time constraint for having the community centre built, would the minister meet with the partners to discuss possible strategies for moving forward on the school build?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would be happy to do so.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-North West.

Homelessness Initiatives

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to sit on the Calgary homeless council along with my colleague the Member for Calgary-Elbow. I was pleased to see our Minister of Human Services join us last week for the 7 Cities conference on homelessness, but I continue to be dismayed that the government doesn't consider this council important enough to warrant a government member taking part. To the Minister of Human Services: given that the Fort McMurray fires leave a significant number of Albertans in a very vulnerable place, are you willing to listen to the concerns of this council?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. In relation to the people displaced from Fort McMurray, we will be working with our regional partners to track the number of people, and we will work with the partners to make sure that they have a place to call home.

Thank you.

Ms Jansen: Well, that didn't actually touch on my question at all.

Anyway, given that the homeless experts tell us that while we have many shovel-ready projects, they aren't a hundred per cent sure that these are shovel-worthy projects, is the minister confident that everything that they are slated to invest in is in the best interests of vulnerable Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. As I mentioned in that conference and I'm saying here as well, we have allocated money, \$1.1 billion, through the Ministry of Seniors and Housing. That money is geared towards building more affordable housing, which will have an impact on the homelessness situation. While we build those houses, we still continue to work with those seven cities' CBOs to make sure that people have temporary places to go to and survive. Meanwhile we are . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: All right. Again, Mr. Speaker, that was a totally different answer than the question I asked. Let's try another one.

Given that one of the most important areas for improvement on the issue of homelessness is the sharing of information that enables service providers to get a very full picture of homelessness in the province, is the minister willing to look into our council and the information we are gathering?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Certainly, I was willing to look into your council. That's why I was present there. I'm committed to working with the council and all partners across the province to make sure that we can reduce and eliminate homelessness.

The Speaker: The Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Emergency Management in Indigenous Communities

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the midst of an emergency the scale of which we saw in Fort McMurray, it is of the utmost importance to remember the many communities nearby that can also be affected. To the Minister of Indigenous Relations: what has the government done to ensure that the needs of First Nations and Métis communities in Alberta are considered and addressed in an emergency such as this?

The Speaker: The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. My ministry does have a seat at the Provincial Operations Centre, which works with ministries and federal partners to co-ordinate the initial response in any kind of disaster. This ensures that my ministry is closely involved in the wildfire response and relaying information as needed to co-ordinate. There is a dedicated unit co-ordinating First Nations and Métis communities' needs, which is comprised of four field officers and one manager. These officers work closely with indigenous communities, providing supports to ensure that all evacuees are accounted for . . .

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the update. I'm glad to hear there is a system in place to help co-ordinate this response.

The generosity of all Albertans has been moving to see. In particular, many First Nations and Métis communities that I've talked to have opened their homes and hearts to evacuees in need. Again to the minister. Many of these communities are remote and limited in terms of resources. What is the ministry doing to ensure that they have the supplies they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I, too, was very touched by the generosity and professionalism of the First Nations and Métis communities who opened their homes to the evacuees in need and continue to be an important part of the firefighting and the safety provided to members from Fort McMurray. The First Nations field officers are in constant contact with the community and working together with them. Over the weekend we were able to ensure that there were shipments arranged to bring food, baby supplies, and other necessities to Fort McKay and to Fort Chip. We continue to monitor the situation and would like to thank the First Nations for their contributions.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like the field officers and the Provincial Operations Centre are working effectively with indigenous communities.

Again to the minister: can you tell me what you have done personally to assist in this emergency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government is working very closely with indigenous communities. I and the Premier have both been

deeply involved in this over the last week. You may know that the Premier is in Fort McMurray today with Grand Chief Courtoreille of Treaty 8 looking over the situation and working towards solutions for the future. I, of course, have personally been involved with the grand chief of Treaty 8 as well as the president of the Métis national association, the regional chief of the Assembly of First Nations, the chiefs of four, five, six – I'm just counting as I look down . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Again I'll remind the member: no preambles on supplementaries.
The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago I brought up concerns regarding the biosecurity of farms. Another ongoing problem is the federal government's enforcement of a ruling stating that Canadian livestock trailers returning from shipping hogs to the U.S. must now use possibly contaminated washing facilities in the U.S., thus risking the transfer of porcine epidemic virus, known as PED. To the minister of agriculture: what has your government done to alleviate concerns of pork producers worried about the spread of the PED virus?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. To this point there have been no cases of PED in Alberta, and it's important for all of us, producers and governments, right across Alberta to ensure that it doesn't happen, you know, working with entire organizations, the processors, the producers, to ensure that our biosecurity maintains importance in Alberta, maintaining how crucial it really is and working also with the CFIA to ensure that their standards are as high as possible and that they meet those high standards.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, given that this virus is also prevalent in eastern Canada and that the four western provincial chief veterinarians and pork boards are concerned about the transfer of this virus to Alberta farms, to the minister: have you and your western colleagues developed any strategy to combat the spread of this disease not only from the U.S. but from eastern Canada as well?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As the member has suggested, the main risk for the spread of this disease is trailers that are not washed. You know, currently we're relying on the producers to do so. They know how important it is. I think it's important that I do work with colleagues right across the country. This summer we will have the opportunity as the federal-provincial-territorial meetings for agriculture ministers, including the federal minister, are going to be in Alberta. It only happens once every 13 years, so I'm absolutely looking forward to the discussions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that these producers have their livelihoods and their way of life heavily

invested in these hog operations and given that measures to stop the transfer of this disease include the washing of any trailers returning from the U.S. and indeed from other provinces so as to prevent the spread of this virus, will the minister lobby the federal government to reinstate the temporary amendment to the regulation that allowed trailers to return to certified wash facilities in Canada to ensure our industry's biosecurity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. You know, I share his concerns. I think PED and other biosecurity risks right across for our producers, whether it's in beef or in pork, are important. It's important to maintain those standards whether or not we have cases in Alberta, actually, to maintain our high level of product that we can market right across Canada and right across the world. It's important. I'm looking forward to working with producers, processors, and other levels of government to ensure what more we can do to ensure that we keep those risks at the minimum.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Bill 205

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As elected officials we want to make positive changes for Albertans. Bill 205, the Pharmacy and Drug (Pharmaceutical Equipment Control) Amendment Act, 2016, will not just improve lives; it will save them. This bill regulates the possession of pill presses, which criminals use to produce homemade concoctions that kill such as fentanyl and W-18. As legislators Bill 205 provides us with a rare opportunity to directly save lives.

Why is this bill so critical right now? Well, it's because 272 Albertans died last year from overdosing on fentanyl. They popped a \$20 pill expecting a recreational high, but they quickly spiralled into the biggest downer of their lives, and then they were gone. Bill 205 gives police a powerful tool to reduce deaths and save families and friends of victims from terrible, lifelong anguish. Restricting pill presses places Alberta at the forefront of the fight against fentanyl in Canada and may lead the federal government to take action nationally.

This bill amends the Pharmacy and Drug Act to license pill presses, used in the illegal manufacture of drugs. It gives police the ability to seize presses, which can generate thousands of the deadly tablets in an hour. Fines can reach up to \$375,000 or jail time. The penalties sound high, but make no mistake. Criminals manufacturing this powerful drug make millions of dollars.

When this bill comes before the House, I encourage all of you to participate in the debates. What better way to use our special position as Members of the Legislative Assembly than by working together towards halting the production of deadly drugs and actually saving lives. While Bill 205 carries my name as its sponsor today, should it become law, it will be the 29th Legislature that will have passed it.

Let's do this. Let's save lives, let's do it together, and let's do it today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Parkland School Division

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My thoughts and prayers go out to all of the families affected by the wildfires in this past week.

I have the distinct privilege of working with Parkland school division in the riding of Stony Plain. Parkland school division is one of the largest employers in my area, with around 1,000 employees, and encompassing 22 schools with a number of alternative sites as well. The vision of Parkland is to be a place where exploration, creativity, and imagination make learning exciting and where all learners aspire to reach their dreams. There is a caring, inclusive, healthy environment at all levels. I am lucky enough to have a child in elementary school, one in junior high, and one heading to the local high school in the fall. The programming is astounding, the options and possibilities endless. This attitude of acceptance and striving towards excellence starts with the local school board.

Mr. Speaker, the administration team is incredibly hard working, attempting to make sure each child and their family is on the road to success, and this is apparent at each school site I have seen. And of course these teachers and administrators work so diligently; they work with our children in mind. This was brought to the forefront of my mind because Parkland school division was one of the first organizations I heard from last week in the days during the evacuation of Fort McMurray. As I discussed with Superintendent Tim Monds, Board Chair Eric Cameron, and Vice-chair Kathleen Linder, there will be families coming, children who need support to finish this school year, grade 12s that need to write diploma exams, and they are welcome. We will take them. We will arrange for free transportation for all of these students wherever they need to be picked up and returned because documentation cannot be a hurdle right now. We will help them finish the year the best that we can.

This is the community where I live, a community I am proud to be a part of, a place of generosity and giving, which is always apparent but never more so than now, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Buffalo Rubbing Stone School

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've all had a really bad itch from time to time. I mean one so bad that you had to reach for a backscratcher, some hydrocortisone cream, or maybe a helpful friend with some fingernails. Fortunately, in the northern hills of Calgary we have just the solution you're looking for. There is an ancient giant stone on a hillside left behind from the last ice age. Although a geologist might refer to the stone as a glacial erratic, a bison or buffalo would have referred to it as the kind of relief you just can't find in a drugstore.

These lone boulders are scattered all over the prairies and continue to stand as a memorial to the vast herds of buffaloes that once roamed the open grasslands and foothills and within the present-day riding boundary of Calgary-Northern Hills. Over many generations millions of buffaloes, some of whom you might refer to as my former constituents, rubbed against the rocks to remove their winter coats and to alleviate the itch of insect bites. These boulders often have polished surfaces and are marked with a deep rut around the base of the stone where countless generations of buffalo have left their marks. In the modern day this buffalo rubbing stone sits in a small park in the quiet neighbourhood of Panorama Hills.

Recently the Calgary board of education selected the name for a new public school that is being built in the Panorama Hills

community. It will be called Buffalo Rubbing Stone School. The CBE chose the name to honour the significance of the buffalo in the lives of the indigenous peoples in the regions. When completed in September 2016, Buffalo Rubbing Stone School will serve students from kindergarten to grade 4, with an expected capacity of 600 students. I think it's wonderful that the school's name represents a historically significant landmark which the children and families can connect with in their own neighbourhood.

So if you're itching to come to Calgary-Northern Hills this summer, be sure to stop by and see our buffalo rubbing stone. It might provide the relief you're looking for.

Education System

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, over the last month or so I've had many constituents contact my office to express their support of Alberta's education system and the fact that the parents and students in our province have a large diversity of choices in the education of our youth. In my own riding of Little Bow there are four public school boards and at least four independent private schools. There is a range of classrooms from the traditional classroom to classrooms that are more self-directed, schools that offer online courses to schools that support home-schooling in various forms. There are schools that provide faith-based education as well as schools that have an emphasis on sports.

2:50

This diversity has allowed students to thrive in the program that they and their parents have chosen. They are able to obtain an education that is far more than just adequate, and they are able to do it in ways that support their own circumstances so that they can improve their lives.

Diversity and innovation have also allowed schools to stay sustainable and to keep their schools in their community. They do this by adjusting to their new realities and taking advantage of new ideas, new technology, or a new focus. The Palliser alternative secondary school runs online courses that students can access from their classroom in Coaldale, from their campus in Calgary, or from their home. This school runs all year long, so students don't need to be limited by course availability.

I've talked about Hope Christian School in this House before. They operate a school that has a self-directed on-site classroom as well as online courses and home-schooling. They also operate some consolidated sites for home-schooling for the Low German speaking Mennonite population in southern Alberta.

Faith-based schools in Little Bow provide blended programs which are based on the values of their faith. That's important to them. Regardless of the school system the student is able to further their education in the best way possible for them. This in itself will provide a richer generation of students to help grow Alberta at all levels.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On April 14 I tabled this spring's estimates calendar. Today I am tabling a revised spring 2016 budget main estimates schedule based on a request from Municipal Affairs officials, so that they have additional time to prepare due their current preoccupation with the wildfire situation.

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table two documents today. Both were referred to in question period. One is with respect to the cancelling of an air tanker contract.

The other is called Air Tanker Group Set Up 2016.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter referenced and circulated at the Treasury Board and Finance estimates debate on May 4, 2016, where I questioned the financial position of ATB Financial. Alberta Treasury Board and Finance responded with the following information with respect to the letter. ATB has informed us that they are introducing new fees in July for cash and coin services that could impact high-volume cash customers, that all of ATB's competitors, except for Servus and some credit unions, charge such fees and that ATB's will be the lowest and exempt more customers than others. The change in the fee structure has nothing to do with ATB's financial position according to ATB's response.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am tabling five copies of a report from the Chief Electoral Officer, that is submitted pursuant to section 44(1) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, listing those candidates and their chief financial officers who failed to eliminate their campaign deficit by the prescribed deadline.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to table a letter from Nick Dira. The House may recall that two or three weeks ago I introduced Nick. He was a gentleman in a wheelchair who, amazingly enough, within a year had recovered some of his ability to walk and is working hard to recover. Unfortunately, Nick has now run into some of the rationing and lack of oversight in our health care system. One of the sentences in the letter: "I am unable to access the health services and care that I am assessed as requiring because of the new policy limiting Glenrose patients to [only] 90 days of therapy." The letter is sad. It's amazing that this is happening in our province, and I would ask each and every member to read it.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise at this time to request the unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 8 in order that the Assembly may proceed immediately to the consideration of second reading of Bill 205.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 205

Pharmacy and Drug (Pharmaceutical Equipment Control) Amendment Act, 2016

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise and begin debate on Bill 205, the Pharmacy and Drug (Pharmaceutical Equipment Control) Amendment Act, 2016. Bill 205 will place Alberta at the forefront of a national fight against

fenentanyl and W-18 by regulating the possession of pill presses. The bill amends the Pharmacy and Drug Act by requiring Albertans to obtain a licence to possess a pill or tablet press, and it lays out sturdy fines for those who have them illegally. Pharmacies are exempted from having to obtain a licence. Other details such as further exemptions will be determined in the regulations after additional consultation has occurred.

The concern with pill presses is that drug dealers use various recipes to manufacture these highly hazardous opioids as well as other deadly compounds such as counterfeit OxyContin and heroin. It should come as no surprise to anyone that criminals mixing these drug concoctions are not known for their quality control. That is why 272 Albertans died last year after ingesting fentanyl, more than double the 120 citizens who died in 2014.

When these criminals mix their fentanyl recipe, two extra micrograms of the drug, the equivalent of two grains of salt, added into the cutting agent turns fentanyl into a killer. Fentanyl is coming into our province in a powder form. To press it into a pill, tablet, or capsule, criminals need a press. I found one on eBay for \$750 USD. It manufactures 3,000 pills in just one hour. Commercial pharmaceutical tableting machines sell for less than \$10,000 and can produce 10,000 to 18,000 tablets per hour. That, Mr. Speaker, is the reason we need to regulate the presses.

Two weeks ago we learned that a massive amount of W-18 had entered Alberta. ALERT, the Alberta law enforcement response teams, managed to seize it before criminals pressed it into pills. If they had not done so, untold deaths may have occurred.

ALERT is Alberta's front line of defence against serious crime, which includes drug trafficking, gang activity, and child sexual exploitation. The highly trained officers recruited to join ALERT are particularly important for rural detachments, which don't have the expertise to deal with many of these crimes. Rural Alberta has suffered equally with our cities when it comes to deaths from fentanyl. That's why I fought so hard to ensure that this government provided full funding to fully staffed ALERT teams.

The arrival in Alberta of W-18 on top of the 272 citizens tragically killed last year by fentanyl underlines the ability that we have to save lives by regulating the devices that produce the pills for distribution on our streets. Bill 205 is designed to give police a powerful proactive tool in their fight against fentanyl and W-18. Officers will have the ability to seize these machines and to fine criminals who have them in their possession. The bill can potentially take tens of thousands of pills off Alberta streets, that tens of thousands of pills of which any which one can kill a person. As I've said before, it's like playing Russian roulette with your life.

3:00

The fines in Bill 205 are unapologetically high: up to \$50,000 for a first offence, \$250,000 for a second offence, and \$375,000 for a third offence or imprisonment of up to six months. There is no reason for alarm at the size of the fines; the criminal can pay them.

Let's look at their business model. A drug dealer can spend five hours manufacturing pills on that \$750 manual pill press. That's 15,000 pills ready for the street. Multiply that by \$20 to \$40, given the street value, and we're talking about \$300,000 to \$600,000 from just five hours of work. If a few people die along the way, well, why would they care? These pills travel all over Alberta for distribution. They don't know their victims and they never will. It is simple cost versus reward. No drug dealer really wants to kill their client, but when the reward is so great, it is a risk that they are willing to take, and that risk is, sadly, the life of the victim. On a larger magnitude scale one kilogram of fentanyl costs \$12,000. A clandestine drug lab with a commercial pill press will compress that powder into one

million pills. At \$20 to \$40 each, given the street value, we're talking about \$20 million to \$40 million.

In developing Bill 205, I wanted to make sure that in seeking to penalize illegal drug labs and the people who run them, we are not causing problems, of course, for those who legitimately use pill presses. That is why my consultation has been very extensive and, I am pleased to say, collaborative. I consulted with the RCMP and the Alberta law enforcement response team as well as Calgary and Edmonton police services. Police made excellent recommendations, which are reflected in the bill that you see before you. I also sought my own legal counsel, which helped direct me to considering amending the Pharmacy and Drug Act rather than drafting a new specific act.

Because of this direction it was incumbent upon me to consult with pharmacists. I turned to the Alberta College of Pharmacists and the Alberta Pharmacists' Association. Both professional bodies provided excellent suggestions, which are also reflected in Bill 205. I sought further feedback from the natural practitioners of Canada as I was not sure if their members used tablet presses. I was informed that they had no concerns. Finally, I consulted with the medical profession as well. In all instances I received strong support as well as feedback that strengthened the bill.

As a former sergeant with the Calgary Police Service I know that regulating pill presses will not mean the end of hazardous drugs in Alberta. We still need education to help Albertans make good choices, we still need prevention in the form of good laws and strong law enforcement, and we still need intervention in the form of addiction counselling and long-term beds for treatment as well as a ready supply of naloxone, a reactionary antidote that has saved lives. Bill 205, however, lets police seize the readily available machines criminals are using to make money and callously kill people.

The penalties included in Bill 205 will provide a deterrent to those attracted to easy money. I'm pleased to note that the fines will go to helping those who have suffered. The victims of crime fund is one such example.

Finally, there is an aspect of the bill that is truly Albertan because Bill 205 seeks to provide a solution to a problem. It does not wait for anyone else to do it; it simply leads the way. Today pill presses are regulated in the U.S. by the drug enforcement agency. They are not, however, regulated in Canada or any other province. Bill 205 puts Alberta at the forefront of the fentanyl fight in our nation. It may empower other provinces to introduce their own laws and it may convince the federal government to take this measure as well as others such as controlling the analogues and precursors for making fentanyl and W-18, but we do not have to wait for anyone. We can't wait. Bill 205 is what it actually means to be an Albertan. We innovate, we problem solve, and we adapt. We cannot wait for someone else to find the answer. We do not look to other jurisdictions for answers. We are Albertans. That means that we are leaders.

A few weeks ago we were all aghast to learn of the arrival of W-18 in Alberta. It is hard to imagine a street drug a hundred times more powerful than fentanyl, but it exists and it is here.

Mr. Speaker, when I was first elected in this House a year and a half ago, I didn't know that this would be the first private member's bill I would be bringing forward. But as soon as I began hearing about the deaths from fentanyl overdoses, I started investigating the kinds of proactive measures that we could take to stop them. Now I appeal to all of you as fellow legislators to consider the important role that you play in this process. By voting in favour of this bill, this is your chance to show true leadership while saving lives. This is your moment to proudly stand up and put aside all political

alliances and say: I have had enough, and I will support this bill because I do not want to see any more Albertans die.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to everyone's comments on this very critical bill. Thank you, sir.

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

Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-West for introducing this bill. His commitment to helping the fight against fentanyl is admirable.

I understand that the Minister of Justice has raised the need for the federal government to regulate pill presses multiple times, so this bill follows up on the member's work. It's worth noting that the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police passed a resolution in the fall seeking federal government, not provincial government, regulation of pill presses that are fentanyl precursors. It appears that the federal government has the best tools available to combat the use of pill presses in assembling counterfeit narcotics.

While this bill introduces a potential penalty of \$50,000 for a first offence, the federal government has much stronger powers to deal with issues like these. For instance, under section 462(2) of the Criminal Code anyone who manufactures, sells, promotes, or exports instruments for illicit drug use is subject to a \$100,000 fine and up to six months in jail for the first offence. The federal government could institute even more significant penalties for pill press possession given the impact of the current fentanyl crisis. As provincial governments do not have jurisdiction over criminal law, we are left with regulatory measures such as the lower fines found in this bill, and these may not be a sufficient deterrent to reduce pill press use.

Additionally, the regulation of pill presses really needs to occur at a national level. Under this bill an individual could still just drive over the provincial border to B.C. or Saskatchewan and legally purchase a pill press in that jurisdiction. So given these individuals are involved in the illegal manufacture of illicit drugs, typically with a value reaching well into the millions, it is unlikely that the measures in this bill will provide a substantial deterrent. Federal government regulation would allow the government to stop pill presses at the border and a much more thorough measure of regulating access.

I would urge the member bringing forward this bill to join us in our call for the federal government to take up the regulation of pill presses. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to speak on Bill 205, the Pharmacy and Drug (Pharmaceutical Equipment Control) Amendment Act, 2016. This bill is a step in the right direction in looking at trying to bring illegal drugs in the pill form off of streets. I have to commend the member for his passion in this area. I myself have addressed this with my colleagues as well, bringing up our fentanyl 10-point plan.

We all can agree that illegal or illicit drugs – like ecstasy, W-18, fentanyl, and MDMA – are hurting Albertans. They're hurting everybody that they touch. It is encouraging to see that we are finally seeing that members in this House are looking to do something that will actually change how we are trying to move law forward to discourage these kinds of drugs. We're trying to hamper the production of these drugs, which will make our communities safer. I know that every member in here wants their community to be safer.

3:10

We've heard from other members of the House. On fentanyl, specifically, I want to reiterate that we are all, I'm sure, concerned. This isn't just a scare tactic or an overdramatization; this is an actual danger that we need to be looking forward to moving something, some solution, forward.

Now, I do see that the government is getting naloxone kits into our first responders' hands, and they are moving in directions of helping people that have overdosed, but I do understand what the Member for Calgary-West is trying to emphasize here: we wouldn't have to go to those drastic measures if the drug just wasn't out there. I understand, and he's brought forward that it is important that we are trying to find ways in all different directions to reduce this on the streets, but, in the end, when we're looking at moving forward, prevention seems to be the better route than reaction.

These drugs are affecting all walks of life. Last year alone we saw that over 270 people died as a result of fentanyl. This is a staggering number. I can't think of any other type of substance that has had such a wide-ranging and deep impact in such a short time. These drugs are putting people's lives in imminent danger, and no one, no matter what community you are part of, would disagree with that. Specifically, young people are at an incredible risk with this because, in the end, grams make a difference with this drug. As we've heard from the Member for Calgary-West, two grains of salt can mean life or death. That seems specifically incredible that we would have something so powerful out there that is being put into a pill form. The thought alone is scary, what it could do to my own family should it get to my own daughter when she gets old enough that this is actually going to be a concern. Fortunately, my daughter is 10 and less likely to be exposed to something like this, but teenagers, who regularly go out, are the focus of a lot of these drugs. Parents losing their children is tragic.

Now, W-18 and fentanyl take it to a completely different level when we look at the long-term neurological effects that these opiates can have on people. Even if drugs don't kill the user the first time, they can create significant brain damage. This is a concern for all Albertans because, in the end, we have youth right now that do not understand that these are not Aspirin and Tylenol. If they take two, they might die. High school students have taken a pill that someone has given them one evening when they were at a friend's house. The next morning they were either gone or their future was taken away from them. These were kids that could have gone on to do amazing things, kids from good families – like mine, like yours, like everybody's in this House – who had their entire lives in front of them, but they were robbed. That's the future by making a mistake with a drug that needs to be eliminated. We need to take action now. Well, we really should have taken action last year, when Wildrose produced its 10-point fentanyl harm reduction plan with my colleague the shadow Health minister.

Now, hopefully, it's not too late to get in front of this issue and start cracking down on the organized crime syndicates that are responsible for the manufacturing, proliferation, and distribution of these terrible drugs. It is my hope that the police will be able to obtain a warrant for organized criminals with greater ease and be able to hold the criminals to account when they are caught with these drugs and these drug labs. The men and women in Alberta enforcement do a tremendous job each and every day. I hope that this bill will put one more tool in their hands to fix Alberta's drug crisis.

I will be supporting Bill 205 at second reading, and I am curious to learn more details about this bill when Committee of the Whole comes forward, when we all have the opportunity to add what we feel will grow this bill into something that protects Albertans. I hope

that the government, across the aisle, instead of just voting down this bill, brings forward amendments that they feel will strengthen this bill instead of just saying to the federal government: please, protect us. If we do come forward and we want to move this bill in a positive direction, I believe that as an Assembly we are able to work together and able to actually make a difference against fentanyl.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and speak about Bill 205 and the important issue that this bill takes aim at, which is illicit fentanyl. Fentanyl is an opioid, or painkiller, that can be used safely when it is prescribed by a health professional and taken as directed. It is also made and sold illegally in our province and across Canada. Fentanyl is very toxic. Just a small amount, the size of two grains of salt, can be deadly. Fentanyl is made and sold in many different forms and can be hiding in other drugs.

Alberta has the highest per capita legitimate opioid consumption in Canada. There is no question that there needs to be a multifaceted approach to addressing both legitimate and illegitimate use of opioids here in our province. Bill 205 can serve to support a broader strategy to mitigate the impact of illicit drugs and stem opioid misuse and abuse. In short, it is one more tool in our toolbox to help stem the tragic tide of deaths in our province caused by fentanyl.

We will continue to address this issue through a variety of actions. This government is exploring as many avenues as possible in response to this issue, including advocating for stronger measures around pill presses and precursor drugs with the federal government; co-ordinating efforts through the fentanyl action response team, which is poised to become a contributor to the overall implementation of the mental health review recommendations; working with the health colleges on the triplicate prescription form drug program; working with the federal-provincial-territorial working group on prescription drug abuse; improving data reporting; and ensuring appropriate information and education materials are available to both the public and to medical professionals.

We also continue to be committed to harm reduction strategy, ensuring that people will have access to naloxone, the drug that can help reverse opioid overdoses and save lives. The Minister of Health has signed ministerial orders that directly allow EMTs and EMRs to administer naloxone, RNs to prescribe naloxone, and paramedics, EMTs, and EMRs to dispense the drug. As well, the Minister of Health has signed a further ministerial order that authorizes Alberta Health to pay the dispensing fee charge for naloxone prescriptions. We know that people are using naloxone kits, and we know that they are saving lives.

As well, we want to ensure that people have access to the supports they need for detox and recovery when they are prepared to enter into them. For example, Alberta Health is currently working closely with the community of Cardston to establish a Suboxone clinic so that recovering opiate addicts will have the medical monitoring and support for opioid replacement therapies.

I want to thank the Member for Calgary-West for stepping up to the plate with this bill, and I look forward to discussing the bill in greater detail in third reading. Thank you.

3:20

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to speak to second reading of Bill 205, Pharmacy and Drug (Pharmaceutical Equipment Control) Amendment Act, 2016. I can say from experience in this House that it's very rare indeed to see overwhelming support from every corner of this room, at least when it comes to debating the emergency of this bill. I can appreciate that from that perspective the government was not playing political games on such a critical concept which will, without a doubt, save countless lives.

Now, to the hon. Member for Calgary-West, the mover of this bill, I truly appreciate your sponsorship of this legislation. Perhaps it's worthy of note that it does indeed come with the inspiration of our former MLA for Calgary-Greenway.

Colleagues, we've all seen the horrendous news stories about how fentanyl and the emerging, extremely dangerous W-18 compound are killing Alberta's children. Let this be completely clear. Fentanyl killed 272 Albertans in 2015, and to me that's exactly 272 too many. The proposed legislation will make a quantifiable and real difference. It'll make it more difficult for drug makers and drug middle-men and drug dealers, for those people to get those drugs into the hands of Albertans.

Again, I know from personal experience during my time as chair of AADAC and associate minister of wellness that these folks are often obviously suffering from addictions of other kinds. They're dealing with unemployment and other unfortunate circumstances, and it comes from an extremely long list. This bill will make it more challenging for Albertans who are simply seeking a recreational high to achieve that increasingly deadly goal.

The measures this bill is proposing will make Alberta a national leader. Indeed, as has been said, that's the Alberta way. We will combat these types of drugs. That's what it's going to take. We'll also make those people who are considering breaking the law and placing deadly cocktails of ingredients into the palms of Albertans think much more seriously about what they're doing and, hopefully, change their minds.

The hon. member has used the penalties from within the existing Pharmacy and Drug Act as a guideline for establishing penalties that match the seriousness of the crime of making fentanyl into something that can be ingested readily and easily. This is critical because some of the main driving factors behind systemic drug abuse are visual stimulation and ease with which a high can be achieved. Now fentanyl pills are breaking these particular barriers with ferocity.

Again, Mr. Speaker, sometimes I wish I didn't know as much as I've learned about this, but during my time with the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission and in my time in wellness, sadly, I heard so many stories, so many horror stories, that I've actually lost count hearing of untimely deaths of children and parents and, yes, even seniors. I will never forget these people. It's with them in mind that I stand here today to speak to this bill.

Now, today as the Progressive Conservative advocate for indigenous relations I want to discuss the positive effect this legislation will have on our First Nations across Alberta. Now, earlier this year the province more than doubled its purchase of the life-saving naloxone kits and has made them freely available in more than 300 pharmacies since February 17. We asked for this move, and we applaud it. However, only four of these kits are known to be located on reserves. The chances of an indigenous youth being killed by fentanyl are significantly higher because they simply don't have the proximity to life-saving support systems if something goes terribly wrong.

We know this is a huge issue. Just as one example, the Blood Tribe declared a state of emergency over a year ago after officials within the community noticed a significant spike in the use of

fentanyl and the subsequent deaths that were mounting. Health Canada has been working with the Blood Tribe as well as 17 of the 45 First Nations to develop a plan to combat fentanyl and educate our youth about the dangers that this drug possesses. Additionally, we know that the province is working hard to open a Suboxone clinic in Cardston in response to the crisis. Doctors, nurses, and addiction counsellors would be located under one roof and provide many of the services needed to help fight the battle against fentanyl.

However, my friends, we can and we must do more. We can do our best to cut off the supply of street-grade fentanyl and other dangerous drugs like W-18, which is marketed as counterfeit OxyContin or counterfeit heroin, that ends up in the hands of indigenous youth and other vulnerable people clear across the province. Regulating pill presses, as proposed in this bill, will mean that there will be decreased opportunities for local illegal drug makers to get their hands on the smaller, cheaper pill presses. It will also mean that the larger scale illegal drug manufacturers in Alberta will not be able to illegally acquire the industrial tablet pressers that are able to compound, as we've heard, over 10,000 pills an hour. This will reduce drugs on our streets. It will save lives.

Hon. members, the magnitude of the crisis on some First Nations is best put according to Tyler White, head of health services for Siksika Nation. "A failure to deal with the prescription opioid crisis of the past two decades has resulted in our present situation where, in some demographics, opioids are more pervasive than marijuana and alcohol." More pervasive than marijuana and alcohol. Hon. members, fentanyl and other pills are more widely used than alcohol in many circumstances, and if that's not disturbing to you, I don't know what is. This is a challenge. This is the challenge that we're dealing with, that we're up against right now and can do something about, so I encourage all members of this House to support Bill 205 to help end fentanyl and opioid abuse in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, before I conclude my remarks, I have to say that I am aghast that one of the previous speakers to this bill seems to be passing this incredible responsibility, may I say opportunity, on to the federal government, who may one day do something about this. Or that day may never come. Let me remind all members, with great respect, that they're talking about the same government who is right now in the very middle of decriminalizing marijuana.

Mr. Speaker, during my time in this House I've been honoured to sponsor many government bills and private bills and private members' bills, and I've been told that the reason that they successfully passed was that a whole lot of research was done before coming to this House. I'll tell you that I take it as a humble source of pride that I championed many causes that went way beyond politics. Friends, I commend the hon. Member for Calgary-West for doing exactly that in this circumstance, and I trust that every member of this House will see this for what it is. Please, in the name of the hundreds of Albertans who have been killed by this curse and all of those family and community members who mourn their deaths and in the name of all future possible victims, I implore you: drop the party colours, do the right thing, and pass this bill quickly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to speak to Bill 205, the Pharmacy and Drug (Pharmaceutical Equipment Control) Amendment Act, 2016. In 2011 our province saw six fentanyl-related deaths. In 2012 that number rose to 29 fentanyl-related deaths, in 2013 to 66 deaths, in 2014 to 120, and in 2015 272 Albertans died a fentanyl-related death. Those numbers total 493 citizens who died a fentanyl-related death.

3:30

Naloxone, when given in time, could and is saving lives from drug overdoses. Supplies for 7,000 naloxone kits have been funded, 4,000 kits have been distributed or are available for distribution through Alberta Health Services, and 3,000 naloxone kits have been distributed or are available for distribution by seven harm reduction agencies in eight Alberta communities.

Mr. Speaker, since July 7, 2015, in my constituency of Red Deer-North Turning Point distributed 379 naloxone kits, which saved the lives of 98 individuals. Recently Alberta Health provided a further \$300,000 grant to Alberta Health Services to purchase additional naloxone kits as well as further supporting public education and awareness. As of March 17, 2016, 613 locations across the province registered to distribute the Alberta Health Services supply of 4,000 naloxone kits, including 102 nonpharmacy sites, 50 of which accept walk-in clients, and 511 community pharmacies. As of March 17, 2016, seven harm reduction agencies across our province are distributing or have distributed 3,000 naloxone kits in eight communities.

Mr. Speaker, more than 1,200 Alberta Health Services staff and 200 external health professionals have now completed the Alberta Health Services take-home naloxone e-learning module, and 80 per cent of emergency medical technicians have completed the training. These are a few steps that our government has recently taken to address the fentanyl crisis in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, our government has taken the issue of fentanyl and W-18 abuse very seriously. Our government continues to be committed to harm reduction strategies, ensuring that Albertans have access to naloxone, and we know that individuals are using the kits and that the kits are saving lives. Our government is continuing outreach and education as well as working to address the root causes of drug addiction. As well, our government is working to ensure that individuals will have access to the supports they need to detox and recover when they are prepared to enter into them. I am happy to report that in my constituency of Red Deer-North 20 beds have been upgraded to provide medical detoxification services at Safe Harbour.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 is another step forward in the fight against devastating drugs such as fentanyl and W-18. This bill will make it illegal for anyone to own a pill press or machine, a tablet presser machine, a capsule-filling machine, or a pharmaceutical-grade mixer unless they are licensed to own one. This means that pharmacies or people specifically licensed to manufacture drugs and those specifically designated in the regulations will be able to own the machines.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all in the House today to support Bill 205, and I thank the member for bringing it forward. Thank you.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 205, the Pharmacy and Drug (Pharmaceutical Equipment Control) Amendment Act, 2016. I just want to say right off the bat that I do support Bill 205 and will be happily voting for it. I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-West for bringing it forward.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West and I used to work in similar neighbourhoods, he, of course, as a police officer and me in my work with the homeless, but we would interact with many of the same clients and had a great relationship with the Calgary Police Service. I think his passion for this issue comes from the same area as my passion for this issue, and that is that he has seen the tremendous amount of damage that drugs can do to individuals and their families. Mr. Speaker, they take our best young minds and they

set them on a path that they are all too often not lucky enough to get out of, the path of poverty, homelessness, and often death.

Over the past year our province has been thrust into a crisis. We have seen the rise of fentanyl and the even deadlier opiate W-18. We know that these drugs are incredibly toxic. Fentanyl is 100 times more toxic than oxycodone, and W-18 is 100 times more toxic than that. Now, for me, that is extremely alarming because it makes me think of the first time that a person in my work at the Mustard Seed died on one of my shifts. Before that, I had seen addicts and other homeless people that I had worked with pass away when I was not at work, but that was the first time where somebody died in our shelter and I was on shift.

It was an individual who had come to Calgary and who was not typical of what we would see in the street scene. This individual had been severely sexually abused in Vancouver and had somehow suppressed that for many, many years. All of a sudden he just snapped and got on a bus and ended up in Calgary, living on the streets. One night he decided that he wanted to numb and self-medicate what he was going through. Somebody within the shelter system gave him heroin, and he, unfortunately, overdosed and died on the floor because of heroin.

That really stuck with me because this was not an individual that even did drugs. He was not an individual that probably would even have become addicted to drugs. He just decided at that time that things were hurting so bad that he was going to make a decision to numb it, and somebody gave him that. That is alarming to me because heroin is bad enough; this makes heroin look like a joke, Mr. Speaker.

We often think of drug addicts and the people that are doing drugs, you know, as the people that we would see on the streets, that are already homeless and suffering, et cetera, but often it's our kids. When this stuff makes it into schools and a young person decides that they're going to experiment with a drug that could kill them in one dose, that's scary. That's really scary to me, and that's why it stands out for me.

Last year, as has been mentioned, Mr. Speaker, 270 Albertans lost their lives due to fentanyl. Now the medical community is bracing themselves for an even harder year. These drugs are chemically engineered to be powerful numbing agents that can be added into a wide variety of drugs, meaning that we are now fighting a battle on many fronts. Fentanyl and W-18 alone can be consumed through injection, by way of a patch, and most frequently by pills. Drugs like ecstasy are also commonly manufactured into pills, and our province already knows all too well the deadly potential of that narcotic. As a province we have to do better to protect our communities. More and more we are seeing these drugs manufactured as pills. We need to make it harder for criminals to produce these drugs, and at the same time we need to make it easier for law enforcement to enforce the law.

Mr. Speaker, I am hopeful that Bill 205 will be a step in the right direction of making it harder for drug dealers to put this poison into our communities and to give this poison to our kids. The reality is that organized criminals are not going to stop making fentanyl or W-18 just because we pass this legislation – we know that – but what Bill 205 will do is put one more tool into the hands of law enforcement to bring these criminals to justice. If a dealer gets busted, they will face an additional charge in their hearing. More importantly, this law will help officers prove probable cause, making it easier for them to get a search warrant and crack down on organized crime.

Mr. Speaker, every little bit helps in the fight against drugs. I'm glad to see that the hon. member has brought forward part of the Wildrose plan, that we outlined in December. Point 9 in the Wildrose 10-point fentanyl harm reduction plan was to encourage

the enactment of "regulations regarding the import, export, sale, and possession of commercial pill presses." Bill 205 is a step in the right direction; let me make that perfectly clear.

Mr. Speaker, we still have a long way to go in combatting this crisis. The best place to start is by getting the rest of our 10-point harm reduction plan approved. This plan will help law enforcement bring down organized crime while at the same time providing much-needed help to those who are at risk of long-term damage from the misuse of fentanyl. This government has recently begun to show some willingness to listen to common-sense solutions on this issue. Our plan suggested increasing access to fentanyl's antidote, and the government has somewhat listened. Our plan called for the restoring of previous funding to the Alberta law enforcement response team, and the government has recently done that as well.

Mr. Speaker, I think that adopting three of the 10 ideas is a great start, but we still have a long way to go. Whether it be implementing a patch-for-patch system, increasing education about the dangers and risk of drug use, or improving collaboration between other provincial governments and the federal government, much still needs to be done to eliminate the threat of synthetic opiates.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, I will be supporting this bill at second reading, and I encourage other members of this House to do so as well. I also encourage this government to think about what else could be done to help those most in need.

Thank you very much.

3:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the bill brought forward by the Member for Calgary-West. I certainly want to commend him for his dedication to making sure that we continue to find ways to make our communities safe. I will expand on that in a few moments, but I do personally feel like I need to address some of the comments raised by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Certainly, assuming that somebody's remarks around federal responsibility imply that they are going to vote against a provincial bill is, I think, short sighted and wrong headed. I think that saying that there are party colours that are driving this decision and, again, assuming that there is a decision being made to oppose a bill that I think has some merit is, again, very short sighted and disrespectful to the members of this House.

I want to say that I agree with comments that I think almost everyone has made around this being one tool. One tool is better than no tools. Obviously, we've been working on this file for almost a year, since we took office, and I'm sure that the previous government was doing work on this file as well. Obviously, a fine may not be as strong a deterrent as a criminal charge, but it is better than no charge. Certainly, I personally have conveyed my feedback to the Member for Calgary-West, who is bringing this bill forward, around my support for finding something that we can do that's within our own controls. I know that his desire might be to go further – mine is, too – but obviously we have to look at what our own parameters are, take those tools within our own abilities but continue to work in partnership with the federal government.

Again, I know that there were comments made around decisions being made in an election platform, in a campaign around marijuana legalization. I have to say that the efforts that have been made by the federal government to date on moving forward with addressing the fentanyl crisis have been quite responsive. I think that there are continued efforts that we can make moving forward, but I certainly wouldn't say that their election campaign, which Canadians did

vote for, which included the piece around the decriminalization and legalization of marijuana, should in any way lead anyone to believe that the federal government doesn't take the situation around fentanyl across Canada, not only in Alberta, very seriously. They're trying to work with us on finding solutions to help address this incredible crisis.

That being said about the comments being raised, I do want to touch base again on a few of the positive outcomes that have been achieved. It was also mentioned that there were only four kits on a reserve. I just want to clarify that there are four pharmacies on-reserve that are distributing kits, those being the Blood Tribe, Tsuu T'ina, Siksika, and Eden Valley, through the pharmacies and other distributors on-reserve, but there are actually 17 health centres staffed by the First Nations/Inuit health branch that have kits available and RNs on staff who are prescribing. Certainly, it's greater access than what was conveyed in a previous comment.

I want to provide that assurance as well as the fact that I know that the day that ARCHES, which is an organization out of Lethbridge, came on to the Blood Tribe and did a harm reduction workshop, that day two kits were used to save lives. That day. That is something we should all be very proud of. Yes, this isn't just about harm reduction. It's also about reducing access to illicit, illegal drugs on the street, and I want to commend the member for trying to come up with one strategy to help address pill presses.

I am thinking about some of the similarities between this and other areas where it would be nice if there was federal leadership. For example, our province and some other jurisdictions have taken leadership around reducing access to menthol cigarettes. That doesn't mean you can't drive over the border and buy menthol cigarettes. [interjection] Thank you very much. But the research shows that if youth, to a large extent, were smoking menthol, we had to take action on that. Just like the member is proposing here, if we have the ability to impose a fine provincially – and we do – we make the efforts to try to create some deterrence. Again, we'd like stronger deterrence at the federal level, but I'd rather have some power in our control of local law enforcement than none whatsoever. I'm sure that my colleagues agree, and to again assume otherwise I think would be short sighted.

Certainly, we will continue to work with our federal partners. We will continue to make efforts within our own ability to address pill presses, as this bill is proposing, to increase access to the antidote naloxone, which has saved lives significantly across this province and can continue to do so, as well as treatment for opioid dependency.

I also wanted to touch on another piece around opioid treatment, and it's about a conversation I had with a First Nations health leader around doing work – because we're talking about manufacturing illegal opioids. There's also opioid use that's prescribed by a medical professional that is being used illicitly in an unsafe way. I've talked to some First Nations leaders who have said that they looked at the rate of prescriptions in their communities, and they had to have some very serious conversations with their members and also with the physicians who were prescribing at increased rates and make serious adjustments to make sure that only those who needed opioids had access to them. Of course, while this is about the manufacturing of the illicit substance, there are also prescriptions out there that are manufactured very legally, but that doesn't make their use any safer.

Certainly, this is a lot about increasing awareness and trying to give at least one more tool to local law enforcement. I want to commend that as well as just touch base on some of the work that AHS has been doing in the area of fentanyl as well. The communications department has launched an awareness campaign that has had some impressions. I guess the visual impressions or

pop-ups through social media and otherwise: over 17 million, and that's driven over 109,000 clicks to the government-sponsored website to help individuals, families, and communities increase awareness about ways that they can address this.

There have certainly been campaigns around posters. When we were at the launch of the mental health report, I remember walking into the washroom and there was information about if you witness somebody overdosing, these are the symptoms that you can look for and these are the next steps you can take to help save their life.

I want to honour the work that's happening in our ministries, honour the drive from the Member for Calgary-West to try to add yet one more tool to law enforcement's capable hands, and continue to say to our federal counterparts that we need to continue to collaborate, we need to move this further because, as has been mentioned by all parties represented in this House, the more than 200 lives that were lost last year were tragic and they are preventable. We need to work together as a community to find ways to reduce access, to provide the harm reduction strategies through the antidote naloxone, and to address transitioning off addictions in a safe and respectful way.

Certainly, today's discussion and, I'm sure, when we have opportunities in committee to consider further amendments that might be considered by this Assembly to try to give us, again, even more tools than we have today and to continue even passing this, should we do so – I'm assuming we probably will – will not be the end. This will not mean that we say no to the federal responsibilities and moving forward and providing greater safety across the country. This gives us a tool. Is it the right tool? Well, it's better than no tools. We want to go further, and we need collaboration with our federal counterparts to make sure that we take this most seriously and move forward in a way that will continue to save lives across our province. Everyone deserves to have a chance, and this is literally life or death, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks again to the Member for Calgary-West for bringing this bill forward for our consideration today.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to offer my very strong support for Bill 205 and thank the Member for Calgary-West for his diligent work in bringing this forward. I think it's very important that we in this House not only seek out the advice of experts in the field but actually listen to that advice. The Member for Calgary-West has direct, relevant experience in the field, but today's law enforcement officers, as they deal with the rise of the crisis of fentanyl, see the devastating effects of this drug, of W-18, of others.

3:50

The fentanyl crisis, my friends, is not a new trend. It happens to be fentanyl this time. It happens to be W-18 coming down the pike. We've seen these things before. Anything that we can do in this House to slow the spread of that drug and the scourge that is fentanyl on the streets is worth doing. It's absolutely worth doing and doing enthusiastically. Restricting access to pill presses will help now, and it will help in future crises as well. It is just one more tool in the tool box.

I'm very pleased to hear the Minister of Health lend her support and the Associate Minister of Health also lend her support. Just to circle back again to this question of: is it a provincial or a federal responsibility? Frankly, we have no control over what our friends in the federal government do. We only have control over what we in this House do. If we are able to do anything at all to stop it or

even just to slow the spread, we have to do that. We're never going to stop speeding cars in neighbourhoods, but you know what we do? We put down speed bumps. This is at the very least a speed bump to stop those drug dealers and criminals from hurting people. Anything that we can do to help is worth doing.

Now, I know we've talked a lot in this House about what fentanyl actually is. We've talked about its potency. When we think in terms of drugs that we may take in a legitimate sense, of ibuprofen or Aspirin, we think of those in doses of milligrams, right? What is a legitimate clinical dose of fentanyl, which by the way is a synthetic opioid that is used regularly to deal with breakthrough pain, extreme pain in cases of legitimate postsurgical or people who are dealing with cancer or any other number of very, very, very serious illnesses? Fentanyl is administered in doses of 25 to 100 micrograms. What is a microgram? A microgram is one-thousandth of a milligram. It is a tiny, tiny, tiny amount that is used in legitimate clinical practice. The drug dealers that are lacing other drugs with this stuff or even just selling it legitimately are selling it in far greater quantities.

How do you die when you take fentanyl? What does it do? It stops your breathing. It slowly stops your breathing. You suffocate from fentanyl. It is an absolutely horrific way to die. Anything we can do in this House to stop that from happening to any more Albertans – to think that this happens in this province almost on a daily basis is frightening, shocking in the extreme. This drug, like all drugs, knows no boundaries of gender, race, socioeconomic class. Anyone and everyone is at risk from this drug, so anything that we can do in this House to address the fentanyl crisis is absolutely worth doing.

I'll say again just a thanks to the member for the work that he has done not just in talking with law enforcement but in his work talking with members of the medical profession, the pharmaceutical college, other practitioners who may legitimately use pill presses in their practice. I think that was one of the questions that I had originally for my staff: well, is this going to, one, help? And I think that's a pretty clear yes. But are there other unintended consequences? Very clearly, you've done your work in asking others. It's very encouraging to know that other professions have said: sure, it may be another step in our process, but we're very happy to do that to ensure that only legitimate uses of pill presses, either manual or automatic, are used.

If it's one more tool for law enforcement to prevent the scourge of fentanyl on our streets, I'm absolutely enthusiastically supportive. So, of course, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of Bill 205, the Pharmacy and Drug (Pharmaceutical Equipment Control) Amendment Act, 2016. I actually take some umbrage at the comments from the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. There is no colour in this Chamber. There is only sense, common sense, and I think that this bill really is common sense.

Bill 205 supports a broader strategy to mitigate the impact of illicit drugs and stem opioid abuse. It's only one element of a very broad strategy, and we've heard a fair bit of discussion in this House already about it. The bill, I think, may be of some real use to our law enforcement officials. But let me be clear. Our government takes very seriously the issue of fentanyl abuse, and I again take some umbrage at the suggestion that we would try to put this aside just on a partisan basis. We know people across the province are facing life-and-death situations, and we're moving forward aggressively to curb the impact of fentanyl here in Alberta.

I want to speak about one other thing about this. It's been mentioned here already, and as a physician I know this very, very well. Alberta has the highest per capita consumption of opioids in the nation. That cuts across all socioeconomic strata, whether it's First Nations or immigrants or people that have lived all their lives here. We physicians – and I'm still a practising physician – may be part of the cause of this in that we haven't been as careful as we might have been to make sure, as the Minister of Health was alluding to, that the prescriptions were appropriate.

But there have been lots of efforts done. The triplicate drug plan is unique to Alberta, actually. It gives the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta some control on the overprescription of opioids by physicians. There has been this FPT working group on prescription drug abuse. We're trying to get better data, and there are monitoring programs beyond the triplicate drug program.

I'm fully supportive of what is being suggested, and I think it's a very important bill. I thank the Member for Calgary-West for putting it forward. But it is only one part of a very broad strategy that we need to be considering, and I think we need to be approaching our federal counterparts and suggesting that they take this issue seriously.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. It's a great pleasure for me to speak today on Bill 205. First of all, I'd like to thank my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-West for introducing this and for all of the work that he's done on this bill. As was correctly pointed out by the Member for Calgary-Elbow, he has truly done his homework, as is his professional tendency, to investigate an issue very thoroughly and to talk to the people necessarily involved.

I do want to take a minute because I think the one part of this debate that perhaps has caused a little bit of, let's just say, rancour within the House was arising from some comments made, I think, quite frankly, with the best of intentions by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I have to confess that when I first heard what the member said, I was a little bit puzzled because it certainly appeared like there was not necessarily support for the bill, but I do think he does support the bill. The member – and I'm going to be very cautious here because he's cautioned me before with regard to paraphrasing his comments – did make reference to the importance of a federal strategy on this and the challenges of having a restriction in one jurisdiction but not having comparable restrictions in neighbouring jurisdictions.

Trust me, living in Lloydminster, I know all about the challenges that get involved with that, especially when we have the legal drinking age of 18 on one side of the border and 19 on the other side. You can imagine what side of the border the bars do better on. But I will tell you, sir, that – and, certainly, I actually think that the ban on flavoured tobacco and extending that ban to menthol is a very good example of this – the passing of provincial legislation in one jurisdiction often spurs neighbouring jurisdictions to do the same. So from that standpoint I do think it is a very positive thing. I don't think it should ever be something that makes us less apt to go ahead with the passing of specific pieces of legislation that apply only within our own borders.

As far as that goes, you know, I would hope that he would probably agree with that principle. So some of the umbrage that has been taken on either side of the House, either by the Minister of Health or my colleague or the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud – I think we can agree that the member's intentions were positive. I do agree with him that we do need to lobby the federal government to bring the full weight of federal jurisdiction and all of the tools

that the federal government can bring to bear on this issue, that they should do that as well, including criminal charges if necessary. Now, that's not within the purview of this bill, as was clearly found by the investigation in doing the preparation for this by my colleague, so I'm glad that that's what he has done.

4:00

Along with my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud and, no doubt, my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View I stand in this House as probably one of three individuals that actually has the right to prescribe and use fentanyl legally. We also have members of the nursing profession here that, no doubt, have also used fentanyl as a drug, and they will know that fentanyl is an extremely potent, extremely useful, and extremely helpful drug in the right circumstances.

I'm glad that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud mentioned the use of triplicate prescription forms because that's something that we in the veterinary profession also use in order to try to reduce, shall we say, the iatrogenic abuse of opiates in this province. It's something that was recognized by the College of Physicians & Surgeons. They approached the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, recognizing that veterinarians also prescribe opiates.

In fact, because of the relatively large size of many of our patients we use opiates that are particularly concentrated. Fentanyl, as has been pointed out, is some 100 times more potent than morphine, but in fact veterinarians, especially those working in wildlife and zoological practice, use compounds that are even more potent than fentanyl. The compound etorphine, better known as M99, is used by zoological veterinarians, for example, and it is 10,000 times more potent than morphine. In fact, one drop is enough to kill a human being. Because of that it has to be handled with extreme care. When we were taught how to use this product in veterinary college, we were always taught to draw the antidote naltrexone first into the syringe and to have it prepared in case you accidentally needle-pricked yourself with M99. And when you consider that these products are used, for example, in wildlife medicine in places like Africa for darting individuals like rhinoceros and hippopotamus, you get the idea of just how potent these products can be.

One of the statements that's been made during the course of debate on this is how this cuts across all socioeconomic strata in this province.

The other thing I also want to talk a little bit about, to the importance of doing something about fentanyl in our province, is that it cuts across all regions. It is a mistake to assume that the problem with fentanyl is a problem that is restricted to Alberta's urban areas. In point of fact, fentanyl knows no boundaries. Fentanyl does not respect any division between rural and urban, and in fact rural Alberta has seen many, many cases of fentanyl abuse; tragically, fentanyl deaths; and, sadly, also fentanyl production and trafficking. In the 2014-15 ASIRT annual report there were reports of fentanyl and the use of fentanyl in Drayton Valley, in Hinton, in Wembley near Grande Prairie, in Taber, Cold Lake, Olds, and Brooks. So you can see that this is not necessarily something that is confined to our large urban centres. In that regard the hon. member's bill is something that will affect Albertans across the province, whether they live in large urban centres or in smaller rural communities.

I know from my own conversations with emergency personnel in the Lloydminster hospital that they estimate that typically they will see one fentanyl overdose case daily. Now, fortunately, they have had very few fatalities. They've been very successful in terms of using naloxone as the antidote. But the Member for Calgary-Elbow was quite correct: an overdose of opiates causes death by respiratory arrest. It is respiratory depression initially and then

respiratory arrest. It is a horrific thing to see. You know, the one thing that we do fortunately have going for us is that naloxone is an extremely potent and effective antidote, but it also is important that it be used correctly. I do applaud the government in its efforts to make naloxone more available.

The problem with fentanyl and what is apt or likely to become fentanyl's successor, W-18, is all related to, again, as the Member for Calgary-Elbow said: if it's not one drug, it's the next drug, and if it's not that drug, it's the next drug after that. It's because there's a shift, and there's always – we have to recognize that the illegal element within our society, the bad guys, as my colleague often calls them, is always looking for a new way to exploit the vulnerable within our society. The beauty of this bill is that whether it's OxyContin, as it was until 2012, or fentanyl, as it is now, or W-18 or whatever the next opiate is that is on the market, banning pill presses and making the possession of pill presses by those individuals who are not supposed to be in possession of them an expensive undertaking will at least be a tool, as has been said before, that can be used by our law enforcement officials across the board.

I'm very pleased to see the support for this. I would also like to say and I'd be remiss in not saying that I appreciate members of all parties agreeing to unanimous consent to move ahead with this piece of legislation this afternoon. I can think of very few issues that we're dealing with that are more pressing than the current situation that we're dealing with in Alberta with fentanyl. Just because of the timelines that are required for the passage of private members' bills and the fact that, even though it may not feel like it, we don't have a lot more Mondays to debate private members' business and we have to get through second reading, Committee of the Whole, and third reading, we'd really, really like to see that happen before we reach the end of this spring session. I do thank all members on all sides of the House for providing that unanimous consent.

Bill 205 is an effort on behalf of my colleague the Member for Calgary-West to do something very positive for Albertans. We all have slightly different takes on how it goes, and I bring again my own experience as a veterinarian, having actually used fentanyl on a lot of patients. As the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud correctly pointed out, it is a very effective painkiller.

I urge members to join me in supporting Bill 205.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 205, recognizing the tremendous damage that this drug has done already in our culture. It doesn't look like there's any containment happening soon. It's a legal drug. That's part of the challenge, of course. It's not only available; it's easily manufactured with ingredients that are available online.

When we talk about preventing use, of course, we talk about at least two levels. One would be education and prevention, and that is ongoing. I mean, that is part of the everyday challenge of parents, of communities, of schools, of people who care about the well-being of young people and others. It's also about harm reduction and intervening in the lives of people that are already in trouble with drugs and addictions and mental illness. It's also about restricting access: restricting sales, restricting who can get access to it, restricting or attempting to restrict, in this case, production. We know that there are alternatives that we can be invoking, and this is one of them. This is one means of trying to reduce the local access to illegal sources.

It's perhaps informative to know that there are six other formulations of this besides pills. You can spray it. You can snort it. You can inject it in your veins. You can put a patch on your skin. You can actually have it in lozenge form as a lollipop, sugar-coated, and you can inhale it in a spray format. Unfortunately, there are already a number of different options for using for those who want to use it, but pills are certainly one of the most common vehicles and one that we could add value to restricting.

I'm pleased with the Member for Calgary-West's initiative here and, certainly, his consultation and the support from both pharmacists and physicians around it and the police service, who know so much about trying to restrict access to it. Obviously, it will be a limited impact that one can have in one province, on one formulation out of seven formulations that one could, if one was really keen to get the stuff, give to oneself, but it's a step. It's a step in the right direction, and it sends a message that we will use any means that are feasible, practical, affordable. I don't think this is going to add significantly to the budget for either the police service or the court system. It is actually, in the end, going to save costs, of course, and lives, so I, certainly, for one would see benefit from this and would be supporting this.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this bill, and I thank the member opposite from Calgary-West for his sponsorship of this bill. As the members in the House may or may not know, my previous career of 30-plus years was with the Correctional Service of Canada. I have over and over again worked with offenders dealing with addictions, so my perspective is a little bit different from the perspective that's been shared this afternoon. Their lives are well on the way to destruction. That destruction is not confined to just themselves but includes their immediate families, their friends, neighbours, and all of us in our communities because we all pay the price.

I also know how difficult the struggle is for them to scratch their way out from under their life's destruction through addictions. I believe that no one wanted to be an addict. I have seen addicts working so hard, fighting and fighting that addiction, and then somebody puts something else in front of them, and they're right back to where they were before. It is so sad that it happens. When presses are used and pills are being made and so easily accessible, it certainly makes it harder for somebody who's already addicted to stay away from those drugs. A drug like fentanyl is a drug that will drag them back into addiction and probably kill them. Their ability to say no is much more difficult than someone who is not addicted. But theirs is a life still worth saving.

Perhaps your daughter, son, or grandchild is out with friends, and someone slips something into a lemonade – it doesn't have to be a beer or a drink – and your child or your grandchild could be right back into that position. To the hon. member across who mentioned that he felt he was safe because his daughter is 10: no, you're not. You have to keep an eye on your children, and that's another part of this whole puzzle to stop addictions.

We must take steps to stop pills being made and addictions being spread among our youth and among other people in our society. This is a step, a very good step, but certainly, as others have said, we need a much greater strategy if we're going to stop addictions in this country, if we're going to stop those Albertans who die because they happen to get one of those pills, whether they do it knowingly or not. If they're doing it knowingly, obviously there's another step that needs to be taken. But I stand here, and I absolutely

support this bill because it is our opportunity to do our part to stop it. We've got lots more to do, but this is a good step.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to take this opportunity to speak to Bill 205. As many members in this House are in very similar circumstances to mine – you know, any time we talk about drug use or access to drugs, especially chemical drugs, I worry about my children receiving or getting access to these drugs. As the Member for Lethbridge-East echoed, it doesn't really matter what age they're at. You know, when I was in elementary school, I knew individuals who had access to drugs before they even got to junior high. It's a reality that we face, and it's a reality, unfortunately, that we're going to continue to face. We need to make sure that we provide as many tools as we can to really try to fight these issues.

We need to make sure that we work collaboratively, and I'm sure I'll echo that a few times when I speak. It doesn't solely lie with the provincial government. All three levels of government and the indigenous people of Alberta need to work collaboratively to really try to fight this because it's going to be a battle that we will continue to fight. When we move past this legislation, there will likely be another chemical drug that will hit the market, and we'll have to work together to fight that. It's a reality that we're always going to face as legislators. It's really sad to hear that 272 people passed away last year because of an overdose of fentanyl.

Ultimately, you know, it reminds me of a time when I was working in the restaurant industry. Being in the service industry, you deal with a lot of people who sometimes are going into their first job or are very young or sometimes may have been marginalized. It was not uncommon for me to hire someone who a year ago was homeless. The challenge is that you deal with people who've had substance abuse, who have fallen off the wagon multiple times, and sometimes they fall off the wagon again. You see them one day, and sometimes you never see them again. You hope that they're okay, but in some cases they're not.

I remember an instance once during my restaurant time. It was a Sunday. Usually on Saturdays people are out partying and having a good time, and kids are being kids. One time one of my members went a little bit too far. I was talking to one of my colleagues. He called me when I was at home, and he told me that he had had an overdose in the prep hall. They had to perform first aid, and they had to call paramedics. Very fortunately, he was all right. He was very fortunate that he was at work that day and he wasn't at home because I don't know what would have happened to him. Very fortunately, the place that I worked at had a lot of supports, so we could provide intervention and help this individual with some rehab therapy. From what I've heard, he's doing well now, but it was a very scary time for not only myself but for my colleagues as well.

I think it's important that we look for all the tools and we ensure that we advocate for all Albertans to make sure that we're doing the right things here. Our government has done a lot of good steps to move forward. Recently we put an additional \$2.6 million into the funding for ALERT, which is going to help combat a lot of the organized crime that we see from this. We've opened up 31 new treatment beds, including 16 in Medicine Hat, and there are additional beds in Hull Services, which is near my constituency as well.

Today I actually had an opportunity to attend the 50th anniversary of FCSS in Calgary. They were doing their annual report, and it was really exciting because for the first time in 10

years they're receiving additional funding. They handle a lot of preventative issues. The number one thing that they think about is prevention. When we move forward with this, we also have to look at how we can prevent people from utilizing this awful drug and other drugs as well. Our government has already committed \$300,000 for fentanyl prevention methods as well, so that's one of the steps along with other organizations like the FCSS programs that we have throughout Alberta.

You know, it's funny. Talking about prevention has been around for 50 years. Fifty years ago Ernest Manning was in this Legislature, and he was talking about prevention. I think it's important that we continue to have these comments and talk about preventative measures, which I've heard from many members around the floor here as well.

As I've said many times, I see this bill as one of the many steps that we as legislative members are going to take to really work towards keeping these drugs out of the hands of vulnerable and young and even well-educated Albertans. That's why I'm going to stand in support of this bill.

Thank you.

4:20

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 205. In fact, I wish that the need to speak to this bill didn't exist as greatly as it does, but unfortunately that is where we're at. I would just like to take a moment to thank the House. It's not every day that we have the opportunity to work collaboratively and find an issue of pressing importance that we all can have some agreement on. On behalf of myself and my colleagues I just wanted to say thank you so much to the House for providing unanimous consent to hear second reading today as it is of pressing importance.

Mr. Speaker, this is, unfortunately, a crisis that is affecting every corner of the province. Oftentimes there is this belief that rural Alberta isn't affected by some of the negative impacts of drugs and crime that affect a lot of the larger cities, but in this case inside the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills we have lost a number of young people. I don't know the exact number, but I know personally at least five young people who have lost their lives to this horrible, horrible drug. The town of Irricana and the village of Beiseker are just two of the places where people have suffered a great loss. It has such a profound impact on a small community when virtually every person in town knows the individual who has overdosed and died. Some of the challenges and the connotations that come with that event and some of the challenges that their family will face because of it – not all of those kids were bad kids. In fact, all of those kids were good kids who made a few bad decisions. Unfortunately, they made a decision that they can never take back.

I think it's our duty, our responsibility to do the things that we can do as legislators to help prevent these horrific, horrific acts. While, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe for a moment that Bill 205 would have likely stopped the deaths of those individuals, it is certainly one tool that we can provide that might just curb the ability for one young person to have access to this horrific drug. If, in fact, we are successful in that, just one, the time we've spent here in this Legislature discussing this important piece of legislation will be more than worth the time because the lives of those affected and the lives of those who are addicted matter. They matter to me, they matter to this side of the House, and I know that they matter to the other side of the House.

We have this duty to legislate where we can. We all have a duty to educate where we are able. I am thankful for the government's efforts in this area. I'm thankful that they have taken some of the recommendations that this side of the House has made and put politics aside to put the needs of the people first. That's why we're working on this issue together. Now, we have a long way to go. We have a giant hill to climb. As we've heard from the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, there are, unfortunately, many ways to access this horrific drug, but the thing we can do to limit the most widespread use is definitely a step in the right direction. So, Mr. Speaker, it's with pride that I stand today to be part of one step in a solution, the step that will allow our law enforcement professionals one more arrow in their quiver, one more tool in their tool belt to do the important work that they do.

It's my hope that there will be many individuals that won't have access to fentanyl because of this legislation. As the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster mentioned, there is a great opportunity to reduce access in the future to drugs that come in pill form. I appreciate some of the checks and balances in this piece of legislation with respect to pharmacies and other individuals who may need to have access to a pill press. I'm pleased that we've worked collaboratively and the hon. Member for Calgary-West has worked collaboratively with physicians, first responders, and pharmacists to try to do what we can to ensure that this crisis is managed to the best of our ability.

I thank the member for bringing the bill forward, and I thank the members of the Assembly for debating it today. I look forward to an expedited process that can see this piece of legislation pass prior to the rising of the House this spring.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would wish to speak to Bill 205? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance to rise and add my voice to the discussion on Bill 205. I think there is certainly a desire for everyone in this House to move this forward. I'll keep my comments brief. We do have a crisis on our hands. We have an uncontrolled product, and if I can build on the comments from the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, I think that as long as these products are uncontrolled and within the borders of Alberta, all Albertans are at risk. We need to be able to take action on that.

I certainly commend the Member for Calgary-West for bringing this bill forward and bringing this bill forward in the best way that he could. I don't think there's any expectation of anyone with regard to whether the federal government should have moved first on this. I think they should have moved first on this, but they didn't, so it's up to us right here right now to move on it. I think this bill will at least get us started, and it's my hope that maybe this will serve as the template that other jurisdictions can duplicate and adopt so that we get a little bit more control of this. I mean, it's like they said. This stuff is nasty, it's killing people, and we need to do what we can to stop it.

Certainly, I want to see this moved quickly into Committee of the Whole, where I would entertain some amendments to maybe see some more teeth brought to this. If I may use your words, the bad guys are in this business to make money, and they seem to be making a lot of it. You know what? Maybe we should consider taking them out of business by giving this a few more teeth to work with.

I would certainly urge all of my colleagues right across the House to support this. Let's make sure that we move as quickly as possible to ensure that no other Albertans lose their lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

The Speaker: Any other members on Bill 205?

I would ask the hon. Member for Calgary-West: do you wish to close debate?

Mr. Ellis: Yes. Thank you. You know, as with many things since the beginning of my political career, I am humbled. I think this is another day in which I am truly humbled. This is a bill, honestly, with the pure intent to save lives. We as Albertans were faced with a crisis, we had to come up with a solution, we consulted with stakeholders, and here we are working together, working collaboratively to come up with a solution. Certainly, I welcome anything, as the member opposite has stated, that could create even further teeth, but I'm happy to know that there is support for the bill. As I think some of the other members have mentioned, if we can save even one life, then we will have done our job.

As I've stated before, Mr. Speaker, this is not the be-all and end-all; this is purely a tool. I've stated that we have educational opportunities for the people in our society to help them. We have preventative measures to help them. The government is doing things regarding naloxone, and they need to be applauded for that. But it is truly that collaborative effort that will allow us to go forward in the best interest of those who have addictions, those who are victims to ensure that we are truly putting our stamp on the province as the 29th Legislature of Alberta in saying that we've identified a crisis, we've had enough, and we will do something effectively to make a change.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. I look forward to further debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a second time]

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I think that if you seek it, you will find it, unanimous consent to go to Motion 505 given that there are estimates this evening and the opportunity, then, for us to rise at approximately 5:30 and prepare for estimates if we were to call the clock now 5 o'clock and begin Motions Other than Government Motions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Minimum Wage Increases

505. Mr. Taylor moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to postpone further implementation of its planned \$15 per hour minimum wage target until a comprehensive study on the effects that these increases would have on employment rates and on the prices of goods and services has been completed by the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table this motion today. The NDP government needs to slow down on its minimum wage hikes and ensure it fully understands the impact of this policy before it makes another poor decision based on ideology rather than sound fiscal planning. In these difficult economic times the stakes are too high to rush a policy that has only been shown to have negative effects on low-income earners. Ensuring that any action with respect to the minimum wage is based on clear evidence

is one of the most important things we can do for workers here in Alberta. Albertans are already worried and anxious in this economy, and they deserve to know if this policy would help create jobs or if it would kill jobs. We as legislators need to ensure that we are acting in the best interests of all Albertans. We can do that by listening to the evidence and to our job creators, who would be covering the cost of a higher wage.

You know, I've had the pleasure of speaking to business owners across my riding over the last year, and this issue is often the first concern they come up with. It seems to me that one of four things are likely to happen when wages are increased from \$10.20 an hour to \$15 per hour in three short years: one, employers paying minimum wage or close to it will have to lay off workers or avoid new hires in order to constrain costs so they can keep their prices down and stay competitive; two, businesses will do their best to automate services in an effort to keep their competitive edge through low prices which will kill jobs; three, prices for goods and services will go up across the board as wages, minimum and otherwise, face upwards pressure; finally, four, businesses that don't have a wide enough profit margin to cover the increased costs will sadly have to close their doors.

Mr. Speaker, the businesses in my riding are not alone in fearing this minimum wage increase. Across the province businesses are already struggling, and according to data from industry Canada personal businesses and business insolvencies have increased by over 30 per cent in Alberta between 2014 and 2015. Even without the minimum wage hikes, the Calgary Chamber of commerce pointed out that in June 2015 Alberta had the second-highest take-home minimum wage in Canada at \$10.20 an hour. A minimum wage earner actually took home nine of those dollars. That's an after-tax minimum wage second only to Ontario's. This massive 47 per cent increase to the minimum wage would kill anywhere between 50,000 to over 180,000 jobs in Alberta through direct cuts or jobs that will never be offered to workers because the minimum wage is too high. That's according to an analysis by the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses.

Wildrose has heard from businesses across the province that want to be consulted. The NDP needs to listen to our province's job creators, who have told us that they're hurting and have to cut jobs or close doors in the event of a \$15 minimum wage. The NDP government also needs to listen to the facts about who a higher minimum wage would actually help. The truth is that the government's own minimum wage profile shows us that the largest percentage of minimum wage earners are between the ages of 15 and 19, and research compiled by the CFIB shows that most minimum wage earners are not only young but live with family members who are not part of a low-income household. Because so many minimum wage earners are young people, the CFIB predicted that a \$15 minimum wage would trigger between a 14 and a 28 per cent decrease in youth employment. Those are their words, not mine.

Even more troubling are studies like those from *Labour Economics*, a peer-reviewed journal that researched teen employment, poverty, and the minimum wage in Canada. The study showed that "a higher minimum wage may paradoxically result in a significant negative shock to household income among low-income families." When the *Journal of Labor Research* studied the impact of the minimum wage, it found that "job losses are disproportionately concentrated on the poor," and also that "political rhetoric notwithstanding, minimum wages are poorly targeted as an anti-poverty device."

It's independent evidence like this that makes me worry that this policy will hurt the very people the Premier claims to want to help. That's even before we look at the unintended consequences for low-

income earners, like the rising cost of consumer goods and child care. Will low-income families have to pay even more for child care as child care providers implement a wage hike for their workers?

4:40

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are all looking for hope in these difficult times, real hope, not the false hope of a job-killing \$15 minimum wage. The evidence is already there in other jurisdictions. Higher minimum wage hurts low-income families. If the NDP truly wants to help these families, it should work to grow the economy so that those earning the minimum wage can move on to better earning opportunities. The fact is that the government already received and ignored an internal assessment that significant job loss is a realistic consequence of a \$15 minimum wage and that major research would be needed to grasp the full implications. All I ask is that the government allow this Assembly to take the time to conduct the research.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the members of this Assembly to vote in favour of this motion and to ensure that we set policy based on evidence, not blind ideology. Thank you. I'll sit down now and let the discussion happen.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really feel the need for the opportunity to rise and speak to Motion 505 as the chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future and also a former job creator, a restaurant manager. The first comment I have to say when I heard the opening remarks and that I'm a bit concerned about is: there are child care workers making \$11.25 an hour? That's a bit worrisome for me. To be fair, I want to make sure that if someone is looking after my children, they are receiving a fair, living wage.

Now, in the most recent estimates that we had with the Minister of Labour, she indicated that she was going to be spending some time consulting with the business community over the summer, discussing the next steps with the implementation and the phase-in of the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. What I worry about with this motion and us moving forward with these steps is that we're just basically going to be duplicating work, and that's not fair to taxpayers. We have a lot of things under consideration with the committee right now. We've had to be fighting for time because of two budget estimates, and we also have to make sure that we review PIPA, which is coming up, as it's important legislation that does need to be reviewed considering the times that are occurring right now, not to mention that if any other bills were to be referred to this committee, it'd be important for us to make sure that we have the time allotted for that. I'm also concerned that if this was referred to the committee, we wouldn't have enough thorough time to look through this.

Further to the point is that when we're interacting with businesses, we need to make sure that we're providing them with certainty. If we're going to be sitting on this for two years, it's not fair to the business community, and a lot of small businesses in the service industry are businesses that are paying people minimum wage. They are responsible for heavy finances. They need to make sure that they're reporting their finances and they're projecting adequately. Therefore, we need to make sure that while we do consult with them and we work with them, we provide them with answers in a timely fashion because they are responsible to their owners, to their stakeholders, and to the corporations that they may fall under as well.

Now, I want to kind of go through some statistics and just talk about the overarching things. In the last little while we've talked

about how one-quarter to a half of homeless are the working homeless. It depends on which region you go to, whether it's a large municipality or a smaller municipality. That is a bit troublesome because even in these times where the rental market is starting to open up and we're seeing decreases in rent, they're still having trouble finding a place to live, let alone feed their kids. We hear a lot about people who are earning minimum wage also being heavy recipients of the food bank as well. This is a time where the food banks are really pinched heavily and are heavily depended on by a lot of people who may be out of work because of the low price of oil.

Three hundred thousand people in Alberta earn minimum wage: 60 per cent of those are women, and 35 per cent of those are parents. That's 100,000 parents that are earning minimum wage right now.

You know, it's been discussed many times that the states of California and Seattle are implementing minimum wage. Now, I want to do a little bit of compare and contrast. They have a \$15 minimum wage, but as we are aware, the Canadian dollar has dropped. Therefore, they actually have a higher minimum wage than Alberta does, and they seem to be doing fine. When I looked this up – granted, it was Friday, so the numbers may have changed but not heavily because I haven't heard anything on the news – \$15 in Canadian dollars is \$11.55 U.S. That means that the minimum wage we're looking at is \$11.55 U.S. I must remind all hon. members that last May, May 2015, when we were elected on our mandate, \$15 in Canadian dollars was \$12.45 U.S. That means that it has dropped by a dollar U.S.

Now, as many of us talk about, the business communities have to deal with the implications of the U.S. dollar because of import goods, but so do the consumers. While things may get a bit more expensive for businesses, especially when we're looking at imports like fruits and vegetables, they are going way up for those who are earning minimum wage. We need to be cognizant of that. Looking at heavy delays in this could be creating huge barriers for families who are simply trying to make sure that their kids have a nutritious meal to eat.

With that being said, I must remind all members that sometimes we look at it in this overarching – that it's going to hurt one business. We're all in this together. Every business is going to be implementing this together. It's not like we're in this business of picking winners or losers. We want to make sure that Albertans are earning a fair, living wage, especially when we're facing Albertans who, because of the low price of oil, have to take a job in the service industry to make sure that they have food for their family and that they can pay their bills.

Mr. Speaker, for that reason and as our government continues to consult with businesses and will continue to look into this and study the implications that come as we phase in the minimum wage, I cannot support this motion.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak following the Member for Calgary-Shaw. I'm just checking some data here, which I will use in my points in this debate. I want to make a few essential points about minimum wage and, really, I would hope, all decisions that get made in this Chamber. One, good data makes for good decisions. Two, I think every single person in this Chamber wants to help Albertans. I don't think anybody here saw an election thinking: aha, I can finally put one over on people. I want to be very clear, as I make my points here, on what I believe, certainly speaking for myself and my

mighty caucus, but I also think that most members on this side genuinely and truly want to help Albertans.

I've been very clear that I have a lot of questions about the \$15 an hour minimum wage. Is it going to actually help more than it's going to hurt? To be clear, in case you hadn't guessed it already, I am absolutely and enthusiastically speaking in support of this motion. I think that we need to really take a moment – well, more than just a moment. We need to study and examine the impact of a \$15 minimum wage in Alberta in this very challenging economic time.

Now, I believe the other side when they say that they want to help people. I know you do. I believe that's in your absolute heart of hearts. What I would love is for every single person in this province to have a living wage, to not have to live in poverty, to not have to be a working parent, to not have to scrape and go to the food bank, to not have to face unemployment or reduced work hours. That's what I want. I think that's what every single one of us wants. But if a \$15 minimum wage puts small businesses out of business, if it results in people finding that they have fewer hours at \$15 an hour than they did previously at \$11.20 or another minimum wage, then have we actually solved a problem? Have we actually helped anyone? In fact, we may find that there are unintended consequences of this effort to help, where, in fact, the government has ended up hurting the people they tried to help. That, I think, is what the evidence is starting to show in the U.S.

4:50

I want to speak briefly to the points the Member for Calgary-Shaw made about the \$15 minimum wage and how it compares to Canadian dollars. That's not the way economics works. With great respect, the Fight for \$15, while a lovely slogan and very easy to type into a campaign brochure, is totally different in a Canadian context. What is the United States? The United States does not have public health care. The United States has very little in the way of a social safety net. The United States barely has public education. We have all of those things in this province and in this country. A \$15 minimum wage in the U.S. is totally out of the context of what a Canadian social safety net would support. Now, what we have in this province, what we have in this country is not perfect. We certainly need to work on those things. But there is a real need to look deeper into what the impact of a \$15 minimum wage would be.

There was mention earlier from an hon. member on the other side that the government is going to consult, and the Minister of Labour has talked about consulting business about the raise to \$15 minimum wage. But the Premier has been very, very clear about doubling down: absolutely, we have made a platform commitment; a \$15 minimum wage is on its way. What in the world is the minister consulting about, then, if, on one hand, you know you're going to \$15 minimum wage and, on the other hand, you're consulting? On what? That's not a consultation. [interjections] So the phase-in, the timing? You're saying: the phase-in. You've also said, as I understand it – it's been very, very clear that this is coming in the term of this government, by 2018. That's coming. So does that mean that we stay low and then jump up a dollar and a half, two dollars at the end? I don't know. But you've said that it's \$15. There's no wiggle room on that. What are we consulting about? That, frankly, is disingenuous.

Let's just talk about the minimum wage increases that we've had in this province over the last number of years, dating back to 2012. In 2012 minimum wage went up from \$9.40 to \$9.75; in 2013 it went up to \$9.95; in 2014 to \$10.20; and now it's at \$11.20. So the cumulative impact of that – that's an 8.5 per cent increase up to \$10.20, and then jumping from \$10.20 to \$11.20 is a 16 and two-

thirds per cent increase. Those are substantial increases. That puts Alberta at the same rate as the next highest province, essentially. Ontario is at \$11.25. We're now at \$11.20. The Northwest Territories is at \$12.50, if I'm not mistaken, but their cost of living is substantially higher. What I'm saying is that Alberta is not out of step with the rest of the country.

Let's look at other data. There's a very clear study in the province of Quebec that shows that once the minimum wage exceeds 42 per cent of the average weekly wage, job losses start. So minimum wage can be up to about that level. Now, the average weekly wage is in the \$28, \$29 range, and that would mean, the average weekly wage being at that rate, that 42 per cent of that puts it at about \$11.50, \$12, something like that. Based on that data, that evidence, that peer-reviewed study, it would show that we're about right, where we are now. Maybe we can deal with a little more.

Let's come back to this. This is not about being punitive. This is not about saying that people shouldn't earn a fair wage. Of course, they should. Of course, people should be able to do that. But if the end result of implementing a \$15 minimum wage is hurting people so they lose their jobs or they earn less money because they get fewer hours, have we actually solved the problem, or have we gone about making something worse? As a government, wouldn't you want to know that? That's what this motion is about. That's what this is talking about. That's really important. I would sincerely hope the government would want to support that.

My final point. A minimum wage was never meant to be a living wage. Those are different things. Those are very different things. Where, my friends, is the overall poverty reduction strategy? What I want to know is: where is the poverty reduction strategy? Poverty reduction is about housing. Poverty reduction is about access to resources. Poverty reduction is about education. Poverty reduction is about early childhood learning. That's poverty reduction. That's what's really important. If we end up with the unintended consequence of putting people out of work, of disincanting small businesses or even large businesses to hire more people, that is going to make what is already a dire economic situation in this province even worse. I know that's not what you want to do. It's really easy to just say: "\$15 dollars an hour: that's going to save the world. That's going to make things all better." No, it's not. There's a big risk that it makes it a lot worse. I want it to be better. I know you want it to be better. I do. I really have talked to many members on that side.

The Speaker: Hon. member, your comments through the chair. Thank you.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the reminder.

This is obviously something that we're all trying to tackle here, this challenging economy, but we need to take a step back on this particular issue. Now, I'm certainly not supportive of sending absolutely everything to committee because I think this House has a lot of work to do directly and not everything should be referred to committee. This is one of those cases where I think it really is important that this government take its time to get it right. This motion is an opportunity to do that, and I would really encourage the government to rethink and support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, yesterday was Mother's Day, and you're probably wondering: why is he talking about Mother's Day? Well, my mother, when we first came to Canada, used to work really hard. She was making the minimum wage that was offered at that time. I can't even remember what it

was. She used to work at the Army & Navy. My mother was the kind of mother that'd go without to make sure that her children would have plenty to eat. I'm sure that there are lots of Albertans out there right now that would probably do the same thing for their children. So it was a pleasure for me to honour my mother yesterday on Mother's Day because she was the kind of woman that taught me that we need to fight as hard as we possibly can to make sure that life is fair for all Albertans.

Now, I respect the intention of this motion: to look into matters, to consult. But I would ask all the members in this House to go and consult with those mothers or those parents that are out there right now making minimum wage, trying to meet the budget. Now, I know that there are members who are saying, "Well, if you increase the minimum wage to \$15, it's going to take away," but that's not what we're seeing in other jurisdictions in North America. We're seeing that it is possible to meet that \$15 minimum wage.

To suggest that because here we have a higher social safety net, to me, is not a good argument at all. Yes, we're going to provide health care. Yes, we're going to make sure that people have access to education. That's what's going to help them get a better job in the long run. But in the meantime you have to make sure that you have a living wage so that you don't have families having to go to the food bank. That's a shame. That's an incredible shame, that we have families in this province that are making a minimum wage and still can't make sure to put enough food on the table, that they have to go to the food bank on top of that. No one who works a full-time job in Alberta should have to go to the food bank to feed themselves. You know, many of the roughly 300,000 Albertans who earn less than \$15 per hour are forced to do just that, to go to the food bank, and this denies them the economic security that their employment should provide and the basic human dignity that many of us take for granted.

5:00

When was the last time that you earned minimum wage? I remember earning minimum wage. I also remember being unemployed and having to do everything I could possibly do in order to put food on the table for my family. Luckily, I'm in a privileged position right now, and we as privileged Albertans who sit in this House cannot forget those Albertans who are struggling to make ends meet at the end of the month.

We know that around 55 per cent of those 300,000 people are one of the heads of their household and that their families count on that income to make ends meet. We know that over 60 per cent of those 300,000 people are women like my mother, and we know that over 35 per cent of those 300,000 people have children. That means over a hundred thousand working parents are trying to raise children on an extremely fixed budget. Alberta can do better for Albertans, and we have to make sure that we stick to our plan.

Our government promised to make work fairer by improving the income of those who work for minimum wage, and work should pay enough so that people can take care of their families. Our government ran on the promise to raise Alberta's minimum wage to \$15 per hour. We have not strayed from that target. However, we fully recognize the current economic realities, as we all do, in taking a gradual approach in order to allow for economic recovery and to carefully consider all input regarding the process of achieving that goal.

Now, our government has committed to consulting with all stakeholders to gain a wide range of perspectives as we continue to monitor business confidence and overall economic conditions. After consulting and after considering, after the Minister of Labour considers and consults, we'll be communicating more about the

plan, about going forward and how we will be engaging with Albertans on the best way to reach a \$15 per hour minimum wage.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I respect where the member is coming from. But I believe that we've waited far too long in order to make sure that work is fair here in Alberta and to make sure that people are earning a fair wage for the hours that they put in.

You know, yesterday being Mother's Day, again I want to honour my mother and all the hard-working mothers out there that do so much for their children. The parents: I'd say that the majority of them are mothers, single moms. Yes, there are also single dads, but the majority are and the tendency is that they're single moms. They work so hard. Some of them even work two, some of them even work three jobs. In my own constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie I've spoken to these people. You wonder why I'm so passionate about that. It's because I've actually looked in their eyes. And when they say to me, "Yeah; I don't earn enough," then something has to be done about that.

I'm proud that this government ran on a platform that included a \$15 minimum wage and that they're still going to work hard to implement that. At the same time that we're going to implement it, we're still consulting Albertans that are providing jobs for other Albertans. I know that we can reach this target, but it's going to take co-operation. It's going to take a willingness on behalf of everybody to make sure that we make Alberta the best place to live for all Albertans, including those people who are on a minimum wage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the opportunity to speak on my colleague's Motion 505. You know, we've actually talked about this, and being the shadow minister of Labour, I have thought a lot about this issue. The concern that I have is that the idea of bringing this minimum wage to \$15, as noble as it is in broad strokes – really, the evidence shows that it will hurt the people that they are trying to help.

Now, I have heard many times from the members opposite: show us the evidence. There's a plethora of evidence out there to show us that this idea of bringing it to \$15 is not the silver bullet for poverty reduction. It just is not. Instead, what it is is a blunt instrument at best, and more importantly what we see is that people who are young are hurt most by this.

I think about the intentions of raising to a \$15 minimum wage. I was thinking: you know, you go to a mechanic, and he does some work on your engine, but he forgets to put the oil in the engine, and then when you try to drive away, it seizes the engine. You know what? I'm sure he had the best of intentions, but you don't judge him on his intentions; you judge him on the outcome.

This is why when we make legislation, when we go down a certain path, we do an economic impact study. When we want to know what the outcome is going to be, we take a look at past precedents, or we take a look at other jurisdictions that have done the same thing. Then we find out what the outcome has been, not the intentions, because I do believe that the intentions are good. But if you take a look at the outcome, there has been no example where the outcome has been acceptable.

I've heard lots of numbers here about how many people are on minimum wage. It's interesting that when they use these numbers, they spin the numbers because in reality what they're doing is they're saying that the 300,000 people who earn minimum wage – that's actually if you take into consideration how many people are under \$15. We're not at \$15 right now. We're at \$11.20, so the reality is: how many people are really single parents that need to

have, as they like to call it, a living wage? About 579 people. There might be a better program than this blunt instrument to be able to help 570 people who really need it.

The other people who have dual incomes, the other people who are younger people that are living at home, that do not have to have this, that are using this as a training wage, these people do not need to have the increase in these wages. What they actually do need is to have training because no one wants to stay at a \$15 minimum wage, Mr. Speaker. No one wants to stay at a \$10 minimum wage. No one wants to stay at an \$18 minimum wage.

Whatever you put it at, it's still going to be something that people say: I don't want to stay there. What these guys are doing is they're saying: let's make sure that people have a living wage there so they want to stay there. We don't want people to stay there. We want them to be able to rise up from that point and be able to have the dignity that they deserve, the dignity of being able to provide for their children and for their families.

Now, this is the sort of thing that these economic impact studies would study. These are the sorts of things that scientists would study. When they do these studies, they take the empirical evidence. They do study what happened in Seattle, they do study what happened in California because we have precedents now. Now that we have the precedents, we can say: "Have we actually lost jobs? Have there been any sectors, have there been any demographic groups that have actually lost their jobs?" What we find is that the evidence is that these groups, especially the young people aged 18 to 24, are adversely affected by a substantial increase in minimum wage.

5:10

I am concerned about the single mom with three young children, absolutely. We should be in this House concerned about the single mom with three young children. She's got a hard go to be able to make it work here. We have increases in costs that she has to deal with. These things are something that we should be compassionate about. These are things that we should really say: "You know what? How can we help?" But remember this: the difference between a tax and charity is that the tax is mandated; charity is freely given.

So when I hear the argument saying, "You know what? We should do more," guess what? In reality, when they came to this great country, people came here not for a guarantee. They came for an opportunity. They did not ask for a guarantee. In communist countries they got a guarantee. That is not what we offer in Canada. What we offer here is an opportunity. If you come here and you work hard, you study, you develop your skills, you have the ability to grow and prosper and provide for your family, whatever the sky offers. This is what we offer here in Alberta. This is what we offer here in Canada.

This is the reason why statistics show that Alberta had the fewest number per capita of minimum wage earners. Now, what did we do right here? Obviously, we must have done something right, better than other provinces. The one thing we did right is that we had a robust economy. We created a juggernaut of an economy – a juggernaut of an economy – that actually allowed us to be able to provide that dignity, provide that opportunity for our parents to be able to provide for their families, not just the needs. The needs are very important, obviously, but what about some of the wants? This is the thing that we can offer in a robust economy. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Hunter: Now, Mr. Speaker, I just want to establish once again, really, you know, the truism that the only guarantees in life are death and taxes. Every time I have heard in this House a member

from the opposite side say, "Everyone deserves" – no. That's an entitled mentality, an absolutely entitled mentality that is causing us throughout . . . [interjections]

Mr. Cooper: Point of order, sir.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to rise briefly given the volume in the House from the other side. I'm rising on Standing Order 23(h), (i), (j), language to create disorder, et cetera, et cetera. While I can appreciate that the other side doesn't agree with the hon. member's position, I think we found that, generally speaking, outside of question period the decorum in the House is often much more respectful. From time to time in question period the volume in the House does get quite loud, but certainly during routine debate it's not the norm of this House. I would just respectfully comment that the behaviour from the other side is not behaviour that is likely to create order.

The Speaker: Any other comments with respect to the point of order?

I think the volume clearly is not of the same degree that I've heard in the past in question period. To the government side, I appreciate the fact that there is a certain norm that is more acceptable in this, that is to deal with a quieter tone of reaction. However, I would also note that the member needs to be cautious about the words that may have caused that reaction to take place. I think it goes both ways, but I would ask the government to please contain your volume of comments and be respectful.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments that you made. It is not my intention to inflame. It is not my intention.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hunter: This is actually a place where we can debate issues. This is actually a place where we have an open conversation to find out what is the best legislation for the people of Alberta. I actually want the members opposite to know that this weekend I was speaking with a group of legionnaires. I said to them: you know, the members opposite, the NDP, and I disagree most ardently most of the time, but that is one of the rights we have here. One of the opportunities that we have is to be able to have that argument. There are some countries where you can't have that argument. You go to jail if you disagree with the government. But it's great that we have an opportunity in this place to be able to have these kinds of debates.

Mr. Speaker, the argument or the discussion that we're having here today is about a motion that was brought forward that I felt in my heart was a good motion, was a prudent motion, was one that offered the government an opportunity to be able to prove whether or not their \$15 minimum wage idea met the litmus test. If it does meet the litmus test, if an economic impact study is done and it shows empirical evidence that in reality this will help those people who we're trying to help and that they're trying to help, then by all means we'd support it. By all means we'd support it.

This is not about us versus them. It really is not. This is about us being concerned about the single mom with three young children. This is about making sure that we have a process or a program that specifically helps them.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak against Motion 505, and the reason why I do that is because of some small math. Twenty-one thousand, two hundred, and sixteen dollars: that is the total annual wage of a person that would be making \$10.20 an hour working a full-time . . .

Mr. McIver: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I know we've only got – probably this is the last speaker. A member from our party may not get a chance to even address this item. I just thought that you should be aware of that, sir.

The Speaker: And I am aware of that, sir.

Mr. McIver: Thank you.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you. A person making \$10.20 an hour would make \$21,216 a year. Now, I know that we are a smart group of people and that that is a really low number if we're expecting people to be able to pay for the basic necessities of life. Really, when we're talking about the wage differential for liquor servers, that's even lower. It was \$19,136. So what I am doing is that I'm rising to speak in support of a phased-in approach to \$15 an hour. Of course, that is a promise that we made during the election last year. It's a commitment, accompanied with consultation with employees and employers, that would be phased in with a goal to reach \$15 by 2018.

I rise because I want to talk about the people that we are really talking about. On average we are talking about a woman, and she is 20 years of age or older. She works full time. She has a high school education or greater, and her job is permanent, not seasonal, not temporary. She's the head of a household, and it is her only job. There are people that work more than one job to make ends meet, but is that what we want? Is that what we want, to have the head of household away from their children more than they should be?

And why is it important? You know, we need to ask ourselves in this House, in this position: do we want Albertans to be able to engage meaningfully in their communities? Do we want that person to be living paycheque to paycheque? Is that something that we really want to be ingraining in people, that they can't make plans for the future?

Living paycheque to paycheque does not allow you to do the simple things that we all take for granted. We do these things in this job all of the time, and we take them for granted. We have the opportunity to go to the movies. We have the opportunity to visit art galleries. We have the opportunity to drive to the mountains. People making now \$11.20 an hour can't do that, you know, simple things for people's families. Purchasing a winter coat is a luxury that we take for granted.

5:20

You know, \$15 an hour after working 40 hours a week for a year is only \$31,200. We're not talking about people that can set aside money for retirement. We're not talking about people that travel outside of the city even. We're talking about people that are just making ends meet.

There are other ways to assist that the government is doing. We are, you know, being a part of investing in the STEP program, to assist students in gaining valuable work experience. The government is investing in the Alberta child benefit tax program, which will benefit 340,000 children. We've committed to investing stable funding in hospitals, in schools, in FCSS. But we all have a role in addressing inequality in Alberta. We have that role as business owners and, you know, as people that make those other decisions.

My dad owned his own painting business, and he started people at \$15 an hour. It was a small business. It was a meagre business. It's not like we ever made a lot of money. He knew that if you had the ability to hire someone, if you had the privilege to hire someone, then you had the privilege to pay them and you had the privilege to pay them what they deserved. You know, it was always part of his business plan. He would draw up a contract that would include estimates of time and materials, and businesses do this all of the time on an ongoing basis.

They do have to plan, and costs do go up, and everyone here understands that. But it concerns me when I meet with stakeholder groups, and they tell me that you can't control food and you can't control transportation costs and you can't control fuel costs or energy costs but you can control labour costs. That gives me great, great concern because what that tells a person is that: I give you what I think you deserve, not what I think you need to survive in this world or to thrive in this world.

Working as a nursing attendant, after three years I was making \$12.50 an hour. I couldn't stay at that job, taking care of people not unlike your parents and your grandparents, making \$12.50 an hour. I went from that job to working somewhere as a supervisor because, thankfully, I did have other experience at that time. But I couldn't do things like own a car. I couldn't do things like take a trip with friends. You can't do things like buy Christmas presents for your family.

It's just, quite simply, not possible. To try and believe otherwise is to be disingenuous. We know what the simple math is, and we don't want to come down to simple numbers when we're talking about people, but those are the simple, at the end of the day, numbers that people are counting on us to think about when we think about how it is that they take care of themselves and take care of their families.

The Member for Battle River-Wainwright was talking about job mobility. Of course, you know, the idea that he is putting across is that you enter at minimum wage and then you use that as your starting point to move up the ladder. Well, when I was working in long-term care, that wasn't a ladder to ascend. That was my job. That was my career. My career was to be a nursing attendant, that after three years paid \$12.50 an hour. That was the post that I chose. So the idea that that job is only worth \$12.50 an hour is appalling to me, and I have to look around this room and expect that it's appalling to everyone else.

Only making minimum wage does not give you job mobility. It does not give you the ability to save for upgrading your education. It does not give you the ability to save for postsecondary. It does not give you the ability to own a car. You know, with public transportation, being privileged to live growing up in an urban centre, you can take the bus, and that is great. But when you live out in rural areas of Alberta, not having access to public transportation limits your mobility as to what you can do, where you can go, what careers you can fulfill. So that's a very basic need that lots of Albertans have that we take for granted all the time.

I want to tell you some of the things that happen when you make minimum wage, you know, just things that we need to keep in our minds when we think about these issues. When I grew up, neither

of my parents could afford a winter coat. We're talking about Alberta winters. So when we're talking about single moms or single dads or even people that between the two of them can't afford a winter coat, it's something that – when I finally had the opportunity, making a little bit more than \$15 an hour and being able to donate to the United Way, one of the things that you could pick was buying four winter coats for a family, and it gave me great, great honour to be able to provide that for a family. Being so privileged to be here and be able to think about those people that are not only in my constituency but in the rest of Alberta, that I can play my part in helping take care of those people, is incredibly rewarding to me. And I'm so proud to do it, to stand up and to stand up for them.

In closing I would just like to say . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've listened carefully to this. This is an important issue, and I believe that everybody wants to do what's right for Albertans, but the fact is that I've heard some interesting things here.

Listen, the fact is that the government has said that they would raise the minimum wage to \$15. The Premier doubled down on it at the Leap Manifesto meeting, at the NDP meeting here a few weeks ago, and she made it very clear in that public pronouncement that she would do it on schedule. So when the Premier publicly says that she's going to do it without changing the schedule, and the government says that they're going to consult with business, it seems completely inconsistent when they've already made up their mind. And they've made it clear publicly very recently that they have made up their mind.

I've heard arguments about minimum wage in Canada versus the U.S. I would say, Mr. Speaker, that if we had the same tax rate as the U.S., that money, that hourly wage, would buy a lot more, which is an important point, too, which wasn't mentioned by the member.

Mr. Speaker, minimum wage is not the same as a living wage. I know that there are members on the other side that would like it to be, but their \$15 doesn't get them there either. I tabled a report last session in the House, I believe, from the poverty coalition of Edmonton that says that the wage in Edmonton is north of \$17 an hour, so, please, the government shouldn't pretend that this is in some way a living wage. It's not. This is the minimum wage. The minimum wage is the first rung on the economic ladder, the one from which people can reach up and get to the next rung.

You know what? We need to look after people working without a high income, but the answer is not to artificially raise their income to the fact where they don't get a job at all. What I don't want to see is those single mothers being told when they come to work after it gets to \$15: "Sorry, I've got no more work for you. I can only hire 12 people instead of 15. You didn't make the cut." That's going to be way worse. The answer might be for the government to think about their income support programs. I agree with the hon. member who said that people working full-time shouldn't have to go to the food bank – I couldn't agree more – but the minimum wage isn't going to get it done. A proper income support program for people working that makes sure that their basic needs can be met, now there's a good idea. Artificially raising the minimum wage is a bad idea.

In fact, there have been many studies. The Labour minister in estimates said the other day that there are as many studies that say that this is a bad idea as say that it's a good one. Check *Hansard*. Any of the government members that want the page, I'll send it to you. I'll be happy to.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, a report out of San Francisco, what's considered one of the most major ones, says that every 10 per cent increase in minimum wage takes away 1 to 3 per cent of the total jobs paying minimum wage. Simple. If you want to help people, don't take away their jobs. It's the worst thing you can do. Listen. I know the government members want to help people. I recognize that. They just need to recognize the truth of how the world works.

I've heard in the past government members say: well, people will pay the least they can, and they'll make more money if the minimum wage goes to \$15. Well, Mr. Speaker, the same people have said: people that run businesses are greedy; they don't want to pay more. Well, the things don't jibe. If businesspeople were truly greedy and paying more money made them more money, well, the greed would drive them to pay more money, and they would make more money, but the fact is that it doesn't always work like that. I'm sure they can find one or two examples where it has worked like that, but I've talked to lots of people from small businesses – I'm sure government members have, too – that said: "I can only afford to hire fewer people if you make the minimum wage \$15," or "I might not be in business and all of the jobs go away," or "I need to automate and have fewer people."

I know that there was a debate a while ago about McDonald's and their machines. I know they have fewer people because they have those machines there, but they did it so they could stay in business. Thankfully, they changed other things in their business model, where they actually hired more than they did need. They're now taking food to the tables. They're providing additional service. They actually are hiring more people than they used to but not because of the minimum wage, Mr. Speaker, and not because of the machines. The machines made them profitable enough to stay in business, to hire other people, but not every business is set up so that it will work like that.

Mr. Speaker, the research does not support the government's proposition that this will cause more jobs and a better style of life for people with low income. The Labour minister herself said that there's as much research one way as there is another. I don't want to see those single mothers with two or three kids be told after the minimum wage goes to \$15: sorry; I no longer have room for you because I have to employ fewer people than I used to employ. That would be terrible. Nobody in this House wants to see that – the government members don't want to see it; the opposition members don't want to see it – so what we're really talking about is the best way to accomplish that not happening.

Mr. Speaker, there is a lot to talk about. There are a lot of studies. Some say that it's a good idea; some say that it's a bad idea. The hon. member that moved this says: let's talk about it a little bit more in committee before the government does something they don't want to do, and that's to hurt people of low income. The government doesn't want to do that – I don't believe that for a second – but that's where they're going. If it was ever true that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, it's with the government's promise to raise the minimum wage in a short period in the order of up to \$15, by 20 or 30 per cent from where it started, and, by the San Francisco study, taking away 3 to 10 per cent of all the minimum wage jobs that are there now. I don't want to see it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright to close debate on Motion 505.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, Wildrose has been hearing from Albertans about their concerns about the rapidly deteriorating economy. Many say that their concerns are made worse by the haste with which this government is pushing legislation through without proper consultation, without regard for current research, and without due consideration of the cumulative impact of risky economic experiments. Albertans heard last year that the government's own advisers warned that significant job loss is a realistic possibility if the minimum wage is set at \$15 per hour.

With many families now struggling to make ends meet and many young people looking for work, the stakes are high. The NDP has an opportunity to avoid making yet another policy mistake by taking the time to conduct a full study of the impact of the \$15 minimum wage before implementing it. So I'm tabling this motion with the hope that the NDP government will slow down, listen to Albertans, listen to its own advisers, consider existing analyses of the impact of increasing the minimum wage, and stop the fast-tracking of ideological experiments on Albertan families, because this is really about, you know, requesting a study.

You know, I heard the opposite side say that they are spending time over the summer reviewing the minimum wage. That's a good start, but why are they consulting when they're going to double down on it anyways and just make sure that it goes through? They said that they were concerned that we won't have time to review. Well, we've got two years to review before this comes in, so we have lots of time for this review to happen.

You know, the minimum wage is not intended to be a living wage, and it never was. I heard that from several members as well.

Members are very passionate about what evidence there is to show if this will work. But the \$15 minimum wage at best is a blunt instrument, I heard. You look at the outcome. There's no example that it actually worked. The ability to rise up is stifled. I heard from the opposite side, too, that they were concerned for a mom with three children. People came to Canada for an opportunity, not a guarantee. That's why they came to Canada, for an opportunity. That's what Canada provides people. If the \$15 minimum wage increase passes the litmus test, it would be supported. If after all the studies are done – the Wildrose would support a minimum wage increase to \$15 if it passed that study that we talked about.

There are other ways to assist children, and this is what I've heard from the members opposite, too. There are other ways to assist, with the child tax credit, and they're putting in the STEP program.

The member opposite was at \$12.50 an hour, but I noticed that she chose to move on to another job. She had the ability to do that. We need to do what's right for Alberta: that's what I heard from another member. Minimum wage is not the same as a living wage. There are no jobs at all if the minimum wage is too high. What good is having a minimum wage that's high?

Albertans are looking for real hope – that's what I'm getting out of this – and evidence, evidence that our economy will turn around before the standard of living is ground into dust. We do not need to forge ahead with an ideological, job-killing \$15 minimum wage, that all research suggests will further destroy our economy and hurt

low-income families. We need leadership that will take a well-founded, evidence-based stand for Albertans. We need to make sure that there's a study that's done, a proper study.

I urge all members of this Assembly to bring their combined voices to bear and vote in favour of this motion. Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, if we could just sneak it in, I'd love to request unanimous consent of the House to move to one-minute bells.

[Unanimous consent denied]

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 505 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:39 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Ellis	McIver
Barnes	Gill	Panda
Clark	Hunter	Pitt
Cooper	Loewen	Taylor
Cyr	MacIntyre	van Dijken

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Phillips
Babcock	Hoffman	Piquette
Carlier	Jabbour	Renaud
Carson	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Ceci	Littlewood	Sabir
Connolly	Loyola	Schmidt
Coolahan	Luff	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Drever	McKitrick	Sucha
Feehan	McLean	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Turner
Goehring	Nielsen	Westhead
Gray	Payne	Woollard

Totals:	For – 15	Against – 39
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 lost]

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

The legislative policy committees will convene this evening at 7 for consideration of the main estimates. Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Energy in the Foothills Room, and Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for Infrastructure in the Grassland Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	827
Introduction of Guests	827
Ministerial Statements	
Fort McMurray and Area Wildfire Update	827
Members' Statements	
Fort McMurray and Area Wildfire Relief	828
Fort McMurray and Area Wildfire Relief	829
Bill 205	838
Parkland School Division	838
Buffalo Rubbing Stone School	838
Education System	839
Oral Question Period	
Fort McMurray Home Reconstruction	829
Emergency Funding for Wildfire Evacuees	830
Fort McMurray Energy Industry Wildfire Recovery	830
Minimum Wage	831
Mental Health Services for Wildfire Evacuees and First Responders	831
School Accommodation of Wildfire-affected Students	832
Support for Wildfire-affected Albertans	832
Public Safety in Fort McMurray	833
Wildfire Prevention and Control	834
Calgary Ring Road Completion	834
Job Creation	835
Culture and Tourism Support for Wildfire Evacuees	835
School Construction in Irma	836
Homelessness Initiatives	836
Emergency Management in Indigenous Communities	837
Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea	837
Tabling Returns and Reports	839
Orders of the Day	839
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 205 Pharmacy and Drug (Pharmaceutical Equipment Control) Amendment Act, 2016	839
Motions Other than Government Motions	
Minimum Wage Increases	850
Division	857

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