



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 10, 2016

Day 25

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
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Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
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Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W),
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
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Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
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Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
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Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
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Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

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

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 10, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's bow our heads, and let us reflect, each in our own way. Let each of us be thankful for this privileged opportunity to serve. Let us accept those events which we cannot control, the courage to lead the change that is necessary, and the wisdom to understand the difference.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Tariq Azim Khan, high commissioner for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. His Excellency is on an official visit to Alberta and is accompanied by Dr. Muhammad Tariq, consul general for Pakistan in Vancouver. I'm pleased to say that Alberta and Pakistan enjoy a strong relationship, and there is great potential to build more partnerships across energy, innovation, and advanced education. During His Excellency's visit we have had crucial conversations regarding collaboration between Alberta and Pakistan in areas such as renewable energy and clean technology as well as sharing knowledge and expertise about the oil and gas sector. And while we move to explore new and exciting possibilities to collaborate, we will continue to build on and strengthen our established ties.

Our esteemed guests are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would now ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my distinct pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you a group from George P. Nicholson school from the greatest constituency. The 25 students today are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Marele Syme, and hard-working parent Mrs. Victoria Twanow. If they'd please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased today to rise and introduce to you and through you the students, parents, and teacher from the Irma school. You know, I had the really distinct pleasure this afternoon to be able to go and meet with them. I talked with the students and the parents and the teacher as well. I found them to be most polite. They were very well-behaved children and had some really good questions. Part of what we got to discuss was that yesterday in question period, when I was able to ask the minister about their school, the upcoming school, he promised to have a meeting sometime in the near future about the possibility of building a new school in Irma. Also, I'd like to say that when I did my practicums for teaching, the first practicum I did happened to be in Irma. So I'm very pleased to be able to, like I said, rise and

introduce this school. Would the teacher and parents please rise as I call your names: teacher Mrs. Tara Gwinn and parent helpers Mrs. Tammy Pauls, Mrs. Kathryn Ward, Mr. Robert Ward, and Mrs. Jackie MacKay. And the students: please rise. Can the members please join me in welcoming them with our traditional warm welcome to this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great privilege today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House two classes of grade 6 students from Namao school. I think they're behind me. They're accompanied by their teachers, Ms Barbara Kleespies and Mr. Mike Paustian, as well as parent supervisors Mrs. Jenn Winder, Mr. Keeling Hedstrom, Mrs. Tanja Crozier, Mrs. Kmita-Aumais, Mr. Jason Van Koughnett, and Mrs. Jamie Hildebrandt. Any mispronunciations are purely my responsibility. Could students, parent supervisors, and teachers please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school guests? The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of our province's exceptional students from the Bow Island area. These students hail from Sun Country Christian School, and while the name may reflect the beautiful local weather – and yes, we do lead the nation in days of sunshine – these students outshine even the brightest day. Sun Country reflects the unique diversity and strengths of educational choice in Alberta, offering faith-based learning in a small, local setting. I ask that the students of Sun Country Christian School as well as teacher Craig Toews and parents Brian and Lora Thiessen, Weldon and Brenda Reimer, and Wendy Reimer, who all made this long trip possible, please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups today?

Seeing none, the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. On your behalf I rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly three constituents from Edmonton-Manning. Master Corporal Don Fraser works with the Canadian Heroes Foundation. The Canadian Heroes Foundation is a registered nonprofit organization that is about creating awareness and support for our front-line responders, our fallen heroes, and their families. It is also a tribute to those who have served in the past, the present, and the future. He is accompanied today by his wife, Cindy Fraser, as well as his son Brice Fraser. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Speaker, it is also my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Edmonton Eskimo Women's Dinner Committee, which I will speak more about in my statement later today. Joining us today in the gallery are Carol Bentley, the chair of the Eskimo Women's Dinner Committee; Joyce LaBriola, marketing and event planner; Cathy Presniak, finance; Suzanne Sparrow, sponsorship and acquisitions; Michelle Pollard-Bruce, sponsorship and acquisitions; and Nicole Moquin, ticket sales. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mrs. Cindy Gracher and her son Stefan. They are Edmonton-Gold Bar constituents that home-school, and Stefan is currently studying the grade 6 curriculum unit on politics and government. Two weeks ago I had the opportunity to meet them at my constituency office, and Stefan had a number of great questions for me on topics like carbon pricing, emission reductions, and choice in education. He also shared with me that he loves science and classical music, particularly Elvis Presley. Stefan also figure skates and plays the guitar and is able to do all of these things thanks to the support, training, and education that his mom, Cindy, provides. I'd ask them now to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

I hope that you did not tell him that he had to take accordion lessons from you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you. I rise today to introduce to you and through you an old friend of mine, who hopefully you'll recognize, seated in the members' gallery today, my good friend Matt Owens. Matt is currently attending the University of Western Ontario, pursuing a dual degree in integrated engineering and his HBA from the Ivey Business School. He's also someone I'm proud to call my brother as he is the vice-president academic excellence of the undergraduate chapter of Delta Upsilon there at Western. Mr. Speaker, you should also recognize Matt today as he was a page in this Assembly from 2012 to 2015, serving as your page as recently as last year. You'll note that, much to his chagrin, this actually means that he served me as a page and my hon. colleagues here in the Chamber as well. Would he please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly Sukh Ghuman, Sam Jhajj, and Raja Nagpal. Sukh Ghuman is a very popular Punjabi music artist, who is visiting from Punjab. She was here performing a concert in Edmonton this past weekend. Sam and Raja are representing Royal Star Entertainment, who both organized and promoted her recent concert. From what I've heard, it was very well attended. I'd ask my guests to please rise now and accept 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 an absolute honour and pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you two outstanding Albertans and two absolute pillars of strength for the Leader of the Official Opposition and, in fact, all of our caucus. Seated in the gallery today are Mrs. Frances Jean and Ms Kim Michelutti, respectfully the mother and the fiancée of the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin. Mrs. Jean was one of those brave Fort McMurrans who made the trek to Edmonton to escape the wildfire that threatened her city and her very large family, who

are now dealing with the destruction of six separate family homes. She has been a pillar of strength in the community through periods of boom and bust and, no doubt, will be active in helping to rebuild the city. I would just like to personally thank both of these ladies for their patience and strength as the Leader of the Official Opposition has travelled around the hard-hit areas of Wood Buffalo. I invite them now to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Vern and Laurie Lafortune. Vern and Laurie are joining us from Red Deer today. They both worked tirelessly on my election campaign, and I was very grateful for their support. Their son Brad is also the chief of staff for the Minister of Labour. I'd like to ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, or the ABVMA, and the Alberta Association of Animal Health Technologists, the AAAHT. First, I'd like to give our kudos and our thanks to the ABVMA for assisting with rescued pets affected by the Fort McMurray wildfire, along with our other partners. Many Albertans consider their pets as part of their families, so we thank you for your care and attention during this disaster. These professionals play an important role in ensuring that our animals are healthy and receive the best care possible. I'm pleased that they're here today as our government will be introducing Bill 13, the Veterinary Profession Amendment Act, 2016. Joining us today are Dr. Darrell Dalton, Dr. Kevin MacAulay, Dr. Margitta Dziwenka, Dr. Louis Kwantes, Ms Linda Glasier, Mrs. Vanessa George, Ms Nicole Olivier, and Mrs. Erin Young. I would like to ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Jon Tupper. Mr. Tupper is the business development officer for the Canadian Cancer Society in Fort McMurray. Jon and his wife, Sandy, and daughter have called Fort McMurray their home for more than a decade. Jon, of course, like the other 88,000 McMurrayites, is anxiously awaiting their return home to begin the rebuild of their community. Jon is especially interested in the rebuild of the social infrastructure of Wood Buffalo, which is as resilient as the people of Wood Buffalo. With that, I would ask Mr. Tupper to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Fort McMurray and Area Wildfire Update

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I would like to welcome back to this Assembly the Leader of the Official Opposition as well as the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. [applause] Yeah. Our hearts continue to go out to both of you and to all of the people evacuated by the wildfires and displaced from the comforts of home.

Fort McMurray, Anzac, Gregoire Lake Estates, and Fort McMurray First Nation remain under mandatory evacuation orders. We continue to focus on those who are evacuated to ensure they remain safe and have access to the services that they need.

We have some welcome news today, Mr. Speaker, that the fire weather is moderate across northern Alberta due to the temperature and wind being reduced and increasing humidity. Although fire conditions, however, are no longer extreme, the fire potential remains high. The wildfire in the Fort McMurray area remains out of control, and as two fires have now merged into one, the size is currently estimated at 230,000 hectares. I am told that the fire continues to move towards Saskatchewan, slowly to the south-southeast.

The current forecast indicates a high of 11 degrees Celsius today, 40 per cent humidity, and winds will remain a factor at 20 kilometres per hour towards the north. Last night we had wind gusts at 28 kilometres per hour, which thankfully is the lowest we've seen in a while. Widespread smoke remains a concern, and we are monitoring air quality closely to ensure our first responders are safe. In Fort McMurray there are more than 700 firefighters bravely battling the blaze along with 20 helicopters, 27 air tankers, and many pieces of heavy equipment.

Mr. Speaker, I continue to urge those evacuees who have not already registered with the Red Cross to do so. People can do this by visiting redcross.ca to register their name and their whereabouts. For those who have already registered but have changed locations since registering, I'd ask that they please call again to ensure that we are updated about their current location. As of this morning approximately 45,000 households have registered with the Red Cross, for which I am very thankful. This registration process is so important to ensuring that we can provide those who are displaced with access to the assistance and services 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, and Albertans can call 310.4455 for information or to have their questions answered as well.

As Minister Hoffman updated yesterday, cabinet authorized \$200 million in immediate disaster recovery program funding, and we will revise this number as needed. Our government is providing 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 continuing to work hard to begin the distribution of that financial assistance. That assistance will be available to those who have registered with the Red Cross. We'll have more details on how that money will be distributed in the coming days.

One of our main priorities continues to be to provide evacuees with information as it becomes available. Last night we held our first town hall meeting over a conference call. These calls allow evacuees to hear the latest information on the fire and the services available to them. Participants were able to ask questions of the Premier, myself, and several other experts, to ask them directly. Dr. Karen Grimsrud, Alberta's chief medical officer of health, and Bill Adams with the Insurance Bureau of Canada were also available along with the government of Alberta representatives from the ministries of Human Services, Education, and the Alberta Emergency

Management Agency. We had more than 15,000 people, Mr. Speaker, who participated in the call, and many good questions and information were provided. We'll hold another call tonight and again on Wednesday and Thursday and hope to resolve some of the issues around questions and concerns and what is unknown for those evacuees. Evacuees should be registered with the Red Cross to ensure that they receive the details of these calls.

1:50

I want to remind evacuees as well that if they left behind documents such as Alberta drivers' licences or ID cards, new cards can be issued free of charge at a registry agent. As well, Alberta personal health cards can be ordered by calling 310.0000 to get a replacement card.

Canada Post is helping reconnect displaced residents with the postal system by registering with their mail-forwarding system. By registering, Canada Post will be able to ship mail and parcels to different addresses as well as reprocess and ship existing mail and parcels. I encourage residents to check online or call Canada Post for more details.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier, myself, and Mayor Melissa Blake were on the ground in Fort McMurray. While there, we were escorted by emergency management experts along with media to inspect the damage first-hand. We saw devastating images that came out of that visit. We've lost about 2,400 structures, but almost 25,000 are intact, for which we are so greatly thankful.

However, I know that some evacuees will be getting the news that the places they called home are now gone. The emotions that come with that, Mr. Speaker, are tremendously deep and challenging. With that, I want to remind everyone that mental health supports are available to anyone who needs them.

Mr. Speaker, another important update for displaced residents with school-aged children is information about diploma exams. All students who are registered with the Fort McMurray public school district; Fort McMurray Roman Catholic school district; l'école Boreal, within the greater northern central francophone education region; and Bill Woodward school in Anzac, within the Northland school division and are registered in a diploma course and are scheduled to write diploma exams in June 2016 will receive an automatic exemption from the diploma exams. Students may still decide to write their diploma exams if they choose, and, where possible, schools will be expected to accommodate those requests.

Starting immediately as well, all student loan payments or Alberta repayment assistance plan payments will be automatically deferred for six months interest free for students displaced and affected by the wildfires.

Mr. Speaker, I know how hard it is to not know when people want to get home, and they desperately want to get home. While we do not have a confirmed date for when that can happen, we will have re-entry times available within the next two weeks.

There's a lot of work to be done before Fort McMurray is safe for people to live in again. Damage assessment and the re-establishment of essential services is under way. Emergency services are working tremendously hard around the clock to ensure that the wildfire is no longer a threat, repairing critical infrastructure to a basic level, and securing hazard areas. The re-establishment of local government is also a critical piece of re-entry. I understand that it is so difficult to hear that it could be some time before you can return home, but the safety of residents remains our top priority. Our government-wide wildfire recovery task force has been established to help with recovery, and this team is working diligently to make the re-entry happen safely and efficiently and as soon as possible.

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 time, money, and a variety of services and supplies, and everyone who has offered to help the evacuees. We are here to support you through these difficult times.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Welcome back, hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. [Standing ovation]

Mr. Jean: Thank you. I take that for the people of Fort McMurray.

Before I begin, I want to personally thank all of the RCMP, emergency officials, and the first responders who have made the people of Fort McMurray and Alberta so, so proud with their actions. I also want to extend our gratitude to all of the families, all of the towns, all of the municipalities, villages, neighbourhoods, and faith communities all across Alberta that are housing the evacuees.

Oral Question Period

Fort McMurray Residents' Housing Concerns

Mr. Jean: My questions today are a simple extension of what the people of Fort McMurray have been asking me to ask all across this province. Premier, with 85 to 90 per cent of Fort McMurray still standing, why do our residents have to wait two more weeks before even hearing about a timeline for when they can return to their homes?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Certainly, our thoughts are with you, your family, and all families that have been impacted by the fire.

Certainly, our top priority is to ensure that when people do return, it is safe for them to do so. This means that we need to make sure that we have safe water to drink and essential services like electricity and heat available in the community. We have people on the ground as we speak conducting damage assessments, and the focus needs to be on critical infrastructure as well. We are actively working to assess the repairs required for the power grid, gas lines, and water-treatment facilities. AHS has deployed a team to assess the hospital and establish an urgent-care centre.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, 2,400 buildings have been lost. We've heard of people trying to see if the power is still on or if their Internet connection is still live. Many other families are poring through videos online or photos in the paper, desperately, desperately trying to see if their house has survived. We know that emergency officials are going through the city. Premier, is there a list being compiled of houses that are still standing, and is it possible for residents to have that information shared with them immediately as they wait weeks to learn when they can go home?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fire does continue to burn in the surrounding area. We have worked with a contracted imagery company to begin assembling images to help people identify their homes and if they're still intact. This involves co-ordinating over the flight path to ensure that photos can be taken and assembling the satellite information. The first priority continues to be the safety in fighting the fires. Of course, air space is limited, but at any time when there is air space available, the company is

working to make sure that we can gather that information so it can be shared with residents, who, we know, want to get home very soon.

Mr. Jean: They sure do.

Many have heard that first responders and other officials have gone door to door to check on the status of each and every house in Fort McMurray. When I've met people from Fort McMurray, whether they're in Boyle or Athabasca, Lac La Biche, Edmonton, or even Calgary, they all want reassurance that their property is being taken care of. Can the Premier tell evacuees that are out of their homes what the reasons would possibly be for entering their properties and what is being searched for?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the important question. There are only two reasons why RCMP would be entering a facility. One is because they are approaching the door, hear somebody in distress, and they need to make sure that that individual, who may not have been able to leave at an earlier time, is safe. So if they hear somebody who is in distress, they will enter and save that individual. The second is if you've registered with the SPCA that you have a pet in the facility, they will happily enter the facility, the home, retrieve the pet, and work to reunite pets and their owners. Those are the only two reasons.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Support for Wildfire Evacuees and Fort McMurray Economic Recovery

Mr. Jean: We heard time and time again from Fort McMurray residents worried as they see their own personal resources drop. I've heard it clearly. Many of them left their houses without ID, debit cards, or even cash. They are in good spirits, but it's the little things that they can't get at the evacuation centres that could make a real difference in their lives right now. Can the Premier please explain what work has been done to get financial assistance out the door and how residents can actually get this assistance as soon as possible?

2:00

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We recognize the importance of getting that financial assistance to evacuated Albertans as soon as possible, so we are providing that assistance to 80,000 people. We are asking for patience as we set up the necessary staff and equipment to support this work and ensure that evacuees receive the support they need in an orderly and timely fashion. We will make that happen as soon as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it's already been a week. Many of these residents don't want to rely on financial assistance for long. They do want it, but they don't want to rely on it. They want to get back to work, they want to rebuild their lives, and they want to get home as soon as they possibly can.

Right now the lost oil sands production is costing the people of Alberta \$70 million per day. Seventy million dollars per day. My question is simple: for residents who are ready to go back to work right now at the mines and at the work sites all across northern

Alberta, under what timeline can they expect to get the call to be able to restart their lives?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that Albertans want to get back to work as soon as possible and that industry wants to resume operations, too, and we are fully committed to assisting them with that, which is why this afternoon the Premier and the Minister of Energy are meeting with oil and gas companies who operate in Fort McMurray to assess the impact of the wildfire and discuss next steps. We are tremendously happy to report there was no major damage to facilities and that no workers were injured, and we continue to work with the industry to make it happen as soon as possible.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we know the people of Fort McMurray are incredibly resourceful, hard-working, determined. With their own hands they built a beautiful city, I would say a world-class city comparable to none other. We are engineers, tradespeople, pipefitters, construction managers, plumbers, and electricians. These are the people we need to rely on to make our city even better than it was before, and we will. Can the Premier today commit to not letting unnecessary delays or red tape get in the way of these workers, who are so important and who will need to start new construction as soon as possible so we can get back to our lives?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the Premier and the Minister of Energy are meeting with industry in terms of the necessary steps going forward. We've heard from industry that safety of workers and evacuees is paramount to them. Once we can guarantee the safety, we will work with industry to resume production as quickly as possible, and we will ensure that appropriate safety and environmental protections are in place. We will continue working with our partners in industry as we rebuild from this devastation.

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

Fort McMurray Wildfire First Responders

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, I've known for years what a strong group of men and women my brothers and sisters at the Fort McMurray Fire Department are. I still consider them family, and in the past week my family has been tested more than ever before. I stand here today beaming with pride that those selfless men and women rose to the challenge and stood tall fighting back that beast of a fire that threatened to take our city. To the government: what immediate supports are being put in place for the firefighters and other emergency responders, who until this point have been supported by volunteers, as they work around the clock to protect our city?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We also cannot express the depth of our gratitude to those firefighters, who are working so hard. With that, the regional emergency operations centre in Fort McMurray, in particular the Canada Task Force 2, who is leading the logistics there, consider providing the necessary support to our firefighters a key priority. We're ensuring they have access to food, shelter, and water, including the mental health supports, to ensure that they are taken care of and that we respect the commitment that they have to the people of Fort McMurray.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, in meeting with my brothers and sisters on the front lines, I know that they're resilient and that they will do anything for their city. In the days, weeks, and months to come, however, the reality will set in, and the totality of this fire that they fought will become apparent. Just as our first responders have had our back in the past week – an army of Davids taking on Goliath – we need to have their backs. Posttraumatic stress disorder is real, and it is something that many will face. What specific supports will the Premier put in place to ensure that none of them go on this journey alone?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the first responders and second responders working on the front lines are our heroes, and we will continue to support them. Everyone who's been touched by this disaster is under incredible stress, and of course we're going to prioritize their supports in mental health, so we have mental health therapists in each reception centre. We'll make sure that the first responders also have access to ongoing supports, not just today but for weeks and months to come. We're also having discussions with other jurisdictions around how we can bring in these specifically trained experts, who will be needed now more than ever.

Thank you.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, I need to remind this House yet again that we are only in May of what is sure to be a very long and arduous fire season. This is a subject I have studied in past years, and I know that conditions are ripe this year for many more fires to take place because of current forestry practices. The boreal forest doesn't stop at the Alberta border, and other jurisdictions are going to face the same wildfire conditions. Fire, forestry, and logging practices need to be re-evaluated. Will the Premier commit to working with other provinces and the federal government to ensure that best practices are in place?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Actually, just late last week, Thursday and Friday, I was at the Western Premiers' Conference in Vancouver. I had an opportunity to meet with Premiers north of our border as well as east and west. They all shared their great support and sympathies as they continue to address their own needs in their own communities, so certainly patrolling borders, making sure that we're sharing best practices and that we continue to have each other's back, as Albertans have shown to Fort McMurray and as Fort McMurray has shown to many communities in the past. We need the support from our partners on all borders as we move forward.

Thank you for the question.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Support for Wildfire Evacuees and Fort McMurray Economic Recovery *(continued)*

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta health professionals are doing a great job assisting Albertans affected by the wildfires, and there are some reports that they're overwhelmed. Fort McMurray evacuees staying at the Expo Centre, I understand, are experiencing symptoms of gastroenteritis. I understand that these people are getting special care in a separate living area. Thank you.

To the Minister of Health: have you learned anything from this that will prevent a similar outbreak when future events occur?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Certainly, it is never fun to have gastroenteritis, especially when you're in a time of chaos, and obviously it has been a very chaotic last week for the individuals who are living at the facility. Unfortunately, it's not uncommon, when people are living in close quarters, for a spread of something like this to take place. I'm happy to report that the numbers are down today from where they were yesterday. Part of that is because of very stringent cleaning practices in the facilities there, making sure that individuals who were impacted were moved to a different area, providing increased bottles of hand sanitizer, and encouraging people who are coming to visit not to if they're sick.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the government is helping Fort McMurray evacuees, and to fight the fire they've sent a large number of people and equipment, and I thank the government for doing that. The province's strong financial position is one of the things that makes all of this possible. To the Finance minister: are you confident that the government will be just as able to help should an emergency crop up once the government is carrying \$60 billion in debt?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Yes, I want to assure the hon. member that the government will do everything possible to make sure that we address emergencies like wildfires and droughts as soon as they become known to us. We'll do everything we can to address them.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to know that the Premier and some of the ministers toured the Fort McMurray area yesterday and got some reports out to people, at least, on the condition of what's there. I heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about people wanting to get home and back to work. To the Infrastructure minister: are there any roads, bridges, other pieces of infrastructure that have been compromised that will prevent people from Fort McMurray and area from getting back to both home and work?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While I think it would be better directed to the Minister of Transportation, I just want to indicate to the hon. member that we're doing ongoing evaluations of all the critical infrastructure in Fort McMurray. The bridge across the Athabasca River was inspected under very difficult conditions and found to be in good shape. We understand that the main roadways through Fort McMurray, highway 63 and so on, are in suitable shape. In fact, we conducted a very extensive evacuation of people who had fled to the north in the last several days, so I can assure the member that critical . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will add my voice to the praise for first responders and for the strength and bravery of the people of Fort McMurray. Welcome back to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

2:10 Electricity Power Purchase Agreements

Mr. Clark: Today I am going to move on to a different matter of government business. Last night in estimates I asked the Minister of Energy about the impact of the termination of power purchase agreements. She admitted a remarkable thing, that after PPAs were returned to the Balancing Pool, the province of Alberta is now the largest dispatcher of coal-fired electricity and will be the biggest payer of Alberta's new carbon tax. To the minister of environment: did you know this was a risk before you developed Alberta's climate plan?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. In fact, at estimates debate last night the record was corrected. The carbon price applies to generators of electricity. For coal-fired emitters what will be happening is a transition from the specified gas emitters regulation to an output-based allocation performance standard. That is the way that this system will work for our electricity generators.

Mr. Clark: But one way or the other the bills are going to have to be paid.

Now, I want to add and make sure that the House is very clear that I do support action on climate change, but it's important to know not just the benefits of a policy but the potential costs as well before implementing that policy. Now, today the Balancing Pool issued their 2015 annual report and said that the return of PPAs "will result in future charges to electricity consumers." So now we know. To the Minister of Energy: have you calculated the cost to consumers from the return of PPAs, and if so, what will that cost be?

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. On the issue of PPAs the government will be initiating an appropriate proceeding shortly, and all the facts will be before the public as issues are adjudicated.

Thank you.

Mr. Clark: I don't know how the other five PPAs are any different than the one that's already been accepted, so there is substantial risk.

Maybe I can help with the calculation of what this will actually cost Albertans. The cost to consumers, based on the return of all the PPAs, will be more than \$1.5 billion, which works out to nearly \$100 per consumer per year. It's Albertans, Mr. Speaker, who pay these bills. Again to the Minister of Energy: can you confirm that Alberta consumers will go from having a credit to a rate rider cost on their power bills as soon as this year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I am not in a position to confirm any of the back-of-the-envelope calculations conducted by the hon. member. What we are in a position to confirm is that the government will be initiating an appropriate proceeding shortly on the matter of PPAs. In addition, of course, the AESO is ensuring an orderly phase-in of renewables as coal-

fired units are taken offline in accordance with the federal regulations.

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

Health Services for Wildfire-affected Albertans

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While wildfires continue to rage across the north of this province, it's certain that the condition of the people forced to flee their homes remains at the forefront of every Albertan's mind. It is a remarkable achievement that almost 90,000 people have been relocated as well as they have been, but I understand that some evacuees in the reception centres are unwell. To the Associate Minister of Health: what is the source of this illness, and what's being done to combat it?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are very proud that, thanks to a well co-ordinated effort and co-operation from all evacuees, everyone has made it safely out of the danger zone. Now ongoing health and support is our major concern. According to recent numbers we've got about 105 cases of gastrointestinal illness at Edmonton Northlands and another six at Conklin Lodge. AHS infection prevention and control and environmental public health staff are on-site at Northlands managing the outbreak. Where necessary, patients have been transported to hospital while others are resting in isolation. Based on the advice of a CDC expert, AHS operations have been reorganized at Northlands to ensure best care.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the associate minister for the update. Given that the mental health of evacuees as well as others involved in responding to the crisis is a concern and one that will be felt for many weeks and months to come, to the same associate minister: what mental health supports are immediately available for the fire evacuees?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We recognize that supporting the mental health of evacuees and responders will be a fundamental part of the recovery process. Mental health workers are working in each of the reception centres, and anyone in Alberta can call the mental health support line at any time at 1.877.303.2642.

We've also added an addictions and mental health night shift at the Lac La Biche centre, and AHS mental health support will be located at each of the four debit card disbursement sites in Edmonton, Calgary, St. Paul, and Lac La Biche.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the safety and health of all those evacuated from the fire zone is largely secure and given that our minds must also turn to the first responders who are continuing to fight the blazes, to the same associate minister: how are the health needs of firefighters and other first responders being met?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the recognition given to our first responders, who have been working around the clock without reservation. Several first responders have also

reported GI illness, and they have been treated on the spot. A Fort McMurray field medical clinic has been established, and a team of four first responders will be flying to Fort McMurray tomorrow.

With respect to mental health, starting today there is a telehealth line dedicated to first responders, which is separate from the mental health line I mentioned earlier. There is also an AHS critical incident team offering support by phone 24 hours a day exclusively to first responders, and we will also be deploying on-site resources.

The Speaker: The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Fort McMurray Energy Industry Recovery

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Our province is a place where people start anew and come to make a name for themselves, and we've been blessed with abundant natural resources, which has had a profound impact on the success of the people in our province. A key piece of our story is the success of our energy sector and the companies that do more than make a dollar. They care deeply about their community, as we saw during the worst wildfire when these companies opened their doors to evacuees. To the minister. Now that everyone has thankfully been able to travel south on highway 63, my question is: how long will it be before these facilities are running again, particularly when there continues to be an evacuation order for Fort McMurray?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, this afternoon the Premier and the Minister of Energy are meeting with oil and gas companies who operate in Fort McMurray, and they will be assessing the impacts of the wildfire and discussing next steps. We thank them for their partnership with us and for all of the assistance that they have provided so far.

Mrs. Aheer: Given that the longer these facilities are down as a result of the wildfires, there's a profound impact on the country's and the province's financial well-being and given that these closures are also seriously impacting not just the oil workers but all of the secondary and tertiary industries that rely on the success of the energy industry to keep their businesses afloat, what assistance is the government providing to ensure that the lifeblood of Alberta's economy gets back on its feet in a safe and timely manner?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we are moving forward in partnership with the companies who are operating north of Fort McMurray. They have all been excellent partners to our government in assisting us with evacuation and other pieces in support for evacuees. It is too early to speculate on any re-entry at this point because the focus has got to be safety and security for the folks in Fort McMurray.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that while these energy companies opened their doors to evacuees, they were also forced to shut down their major operations due to safety concerns and given that the wildfire has no regard for these multimillion-dollar facilities and the key infrastructure that surrounds them, what discussions have been held with the energy companies to survey the damaged infrastructure, including pipelines, and what will be done to get them operating at full capacity?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we are happy to report that there was no major damage to facilities and that no workers were injured, in part because of the excellent safety response of the oil sands operators north of Fort McMurray. You know, industry has stood with Albertans during their time of need. We'll stand with industry as we rebuild from this disaster. First and foremost in terms of working in Fort McMurray, we need to make sure that the townsite is safe, the critical infrastructure is safe, including clean water and all of the other services that need to be in place.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Calgary-Lougheed.

2:20 Wildfire Control and Support for Recovery

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Fort McMurray fire is creating catastrophic effects for thousands of residents in many ways, including fire protection, addictions, and advanced education. The beast, as it is known, has spiralled into a vortex that demands vast firefighting resources. To the minister responsible: with more than 10 other wildfires burning in the province, including another dangerous one northeast of Cadotte Lake, can you assure indigenous peoples and all Albertans that the province has enough resources to respond to any fire that may suddenly threaten any Alberta community?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. You know, we have resources right across the province. He's absolutely right. The concentration has been in Fort McMurray, but there are dry, tinderlike conditions right across the province. We've seen a little bit of relief these past few days, but he can rest assured that our resources are in place where they're needed, when they're needed right across the province.

Mr. Rodney: During my time as chair of AADAC and associate minister of wellness I visited the addictions facilities in Fort McMurray, and I witnessed first-hand the unique needs of clients there. Given that highly stressful crises dramatically intensify the need for support, to the Minister of Health: with these critical treatment centres shut down, where can citizens seek assistance, including specifically those congregating right now at the Northlands evacuation centre?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We are happy to report that all of the people who were at the treatment facility in Fort McMurray have been relocated and are receiving the treatment that they require at appropriate facilities in the Edmonton zone.

We are working very diligently to address the mental health needs of our population immediately and in the near future. As I mentioned earlier, we have added an addictions and mental health night shift to the Lac La Biche centre and are continuing to work with AHS to assess the needs of evacuees and ensure that the appropriate supports are in place.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Associate Minister. That's good news.

Given that Keyano College has been fortunate not to have sustained damage but that its programs and services have been postponed indefinitely and given that Keyano will have to regroup

when its business operations resume and that students have to obviously consider their options depending on how the delay fits into their plans, to the Minister of Advanced Education: what kind of support will you provide to Keyano College students and staff to ensure that it can resume operations in the most efficient manner when it is indeed safe to do so?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you to the member for the question. I had the opportunity to attend a makeshift convocation ceremony that Keyano College students put on for themselves, hosted at Grant MacEwan campus. It was a rather touching moment to see people make their own diplomas and celebrate what was otherwise denied to them.

Our department is working hard with our postsecondary institutions to make sure that business at Keyano College continues as well as it can. I'm particularly thankful to our partners at NAIT, who are providing payroll services to staff at Keyano College. We'll make sure that the students and staff and administration can get back to school within . . .

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

Wildfire Emergency Funding Eligibility

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many First Nations people who live in and around Fort McMurray also lost everything. Like so many others, First Nations people have been evacuated from the area and now find themselves struggling. My question to the Minister of Human Services: in the face of this terrible tragedy and since First Nations are the responsibility of both federal and provincial governments, will First Nations and Métis people qualify for the \$1,250 payment being given to adults and the \$500 payment being given to dependants, or has the federal government made other commitments?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're working very closely with indigenous communities during this provincial state of emergency to reassure them that regardless of where you live in Alberta or what your status may be, all Albertans who were forced from their home or are unable to return for an extended period of time will receive a variety of supports from us, including the income supports. Certainly, Indigenous Relations is sitting in on the Provincial Operations Centre, as is First Nations indigenous health branch, as is Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. We also have indigenous field officers who are working very closely . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, since I can't help but think about what happened on March 12 in Lac La Biche when a fire ripped through an apartment building and the foreign workers who lived there lost everything and given that Alberta Human Services did not help those fire victims with their costs, will the minister be helping the many foreign workers who were displaced from Fort McMurray with financial assistance measures, and are they at risk of being sent home because their jobs are now on hold?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the great question. Certainly, we recognize that all of those who were forced to evacuate the Fort McMurray area and are unable to return to their homes are experiencing substantial and tremendous distress, so

we've opened those supports to all of those who were evacuated regardless, again, of their status, and we will work with them. We certainly recognize the issue, with them being tied to the community in terms of being here, and we will work diligently to try to address that in order to ensure that they can stay here and find work elsewhere.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, given that this government has shown a pattern of behaviour that suggests that it simply does not understand the costs and challenges of running a small business, how is the minister planning on helping small-business owners and their family member employees from Fort McMurray who do not qualify for EI but will still have to take care of their families and pay their bills while they try to rebuild their lives?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly recognize that small businesses are the heart of communities and that they are absolutely essential to maintaining healthy communities. We're committed to working with the small-business community in Fort McMurray to provide the resources they need to become re-established. In the meantime, of course, we will continue to provide every single adult \$1,250 for intermediate costs. We're ensuring they have access to their basic needs and also providing support for their dependants as well.

Red Cross also has coverage for those who have immediate financial needs, and they can have that conversation.

Carbon Levy

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, the current government's carbon tax will make life more expensive for all Albertans and raise costs on businesses in our province. Yesterday, while discussing the main estimates for Infrastructure, the minister admitted that there was no finished assessment on how the carbon tax will impact costs for the construction industry. While there's no formal assessment, has the current government asked Alberta's construction industry, to see how the increase in gas and diesel prices will impact them?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I had a further opportunity to discuss this matter with my officials in the department, and it is extremely difficult to calculate these things. We will undoubtedly see some incremental effect with respect to that, but that will have to be tested when we see tenders in. We are still expecting the tenders to come in at lower prices because of the downturn in the economy. This is a great time to be investing in the infrastructure that Albertans need. We can get very good deals at low interest rates. This is the right thing to do for the people of Alberta.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, given that the carbon tax has impact to individual Albertans and will certainly be a burden and given that those charged with constructing the buildings required in our province will see no relief from this new tax and given that buildings like schools need to be heated once they're open and that thousands of students require busing transportation, has the current government done any assessment on how taxpayer dollars allocated to education will get less bang for their buck as a result of this carbon tax?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the piece that the opposition leaves out consistently is the reinvestment in energy efficiency programs. Those are designed to reduce emissions

and therefore costs. That is a piece that I am aware the previous government didn't understand given that they left us as being one of the only places in North America without an energy efficiency strategy. Also, the Official Opposition has no concept of how this basic energy efficiency calculation works.

Mr. Schneider: It's easier to attack the opposition than to answer the question, Mr. Speaker.

Given that there are numerous hospital projects on the go in the current government's proposed capital plan and given that many types of surgeries that have been booked by doctors must go forward and given that hospital facilities need constant, around-the-clock electricity and heat in order to function, has the current government done any assessment about their ideological carbon tax, that will affect health care costs in our province?

Ms Phillips: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, you know, our carbon levy will be reinvested right here in Alberta in a number of different initiatives, not the least of which is public infrastructure, in order to reduce our emissions. That is the point because greenhouse gas emissions cause climate change, which is real. So what we are trying to do here is to price those emissions as per many, many economists' advice, including Preston Manning's. We will reduce those emissions, and organizations will reduce their costs.

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

2:30

Resource Industry Policies

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent wildfires have caused direct damage estimated to be in the billions of dollars, and any disruption to the oil sands' production will hamper Alberta's economic sustainability. As other areas of Alberta are also susceptible to wildfires, it is assumed that much of Alberta's economic activity will appropriately be shifted to disaster recovery. To the Minister of Energy: what has been done in the last week to reassure and counsel general investors and others that Alberta will continue to be open for business?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We fully recognize the importance of the energy industry to this province and not only to the province but to the whole, entire country that we live in. That's why we're committed to working with our industry partners. In fact, the Premier and Minister of Energy are meeting with key representatives today to have the conversations about how to restore that industry as quickly as possible in a safe, efficient, and orderly fashion.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's forested areas are key aspects of the carbon cycle in Alberta by storing carbon as they grow and releasing it as plant material is used or burned and given that many Alberta jobs depend directly on the forest through harvesting timber and touring guests into or through forested areas and given that these industries are now being rendered inoperable, to the minister of forestry: what supports will be made available to the companies and individuals operating in this sector as they look to return to work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. It's important to note that the vast majority of

the forested area, the green area in Alberta, has been allocated to a forestry company under a forest management agreement. The forestry industry, you know, I'm pleased to say, has been doing very well and will continue to do very well with some challenges on the horizon. But I see no reason to think that the forestry industry is going to see a large hit from this disaster or otherwise going forward, knowing that there are some challenges.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the recent wildfires showed the value of roads for Alberta's remote communities and given that highway 63, which is a key lifeline for industry, became a lifeline for evacuation and supplies and given that many other remote communities are difficult to access and expensive to supply in normal circumstances, never mind in an emergency, to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: are you considering any partnerships with private builders to stimulate the economy and improve access to rural communities?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the very good question. We're doing a great deal of work both in Transportation and in Infrastructure to reach out to our stakeholders to develop and strengthen the partnerships that we have. We restored funding to the STIP program, which the previous government had allowed to lapse, which will improve rural transportation and provide options for rural municipalities to assist in economic development. So, yes, in response to his question, we are doing a great deal to work with our partners in rural Alberta and in the private sector in order to improve the rural economy and the transportation of goods and people.

The Speaker: The Member for Sherwood Park.

Fort McMurray and Area Environmental Monitoring Province-wide Fire Bans

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past week we have heard stories of Fort McMurrans losing their homes and belongings as they evacuated the area. This is devastating. Albertans have acted generously to show support for affected Albertans. My constituents are also concerned about the support our government is providing for less visible consequences such as the impact and hazards that the fires will have on the environment. Fort McMurrans need to be able to safely return home. Could the Minister of Environment and Parks provide an update on the work the department is doing to monitor air quality . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Phillips: Thank you for the question. I'm pleased to update the House on the matter of air quality in the Wood Buffalo region. There have been severe air quality warnings in the Fort McMurray region due to the ongoing fires. There are five mobile air quality monitoring units that have been installed in addition to the stationary monitoring units that are already in the area. AEMERA, under the guidance of Environment and Parks and in partnership with Canadian Forces, has installed three mobile units. The Wood Buffalo Environmental Association has provided an additional two mobile units. Additional air monitoring needs will be evaluated and assessed to determine priority resources. We'll begin the soil monitoring in the region once it is safe to have staff do so.

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

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the information. Could the minister provide an update on any additional monitoring or support for the region?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to update the House on the other matters that we are working on. We're working with the Fort McMurray First Nation to install an air monitoring unit. We're working with the Public Health Agency of Canada for additional support related to indoor air quality. We're continuing to provide support for water and waste-water treatment facilities and the managing of solid waste, and we're providing assistance and support for waste management issues in camps north of Fort McMurray.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this weekend we saw brush fires in Edmonton and that now there are many other fires burning around the province, to the same minister: what is the importance of the fire bans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, no one wants to be that person who is responsible, however inadvertently or accidentally, for another fire that might divert resources away from the priority areas in our province. I would like to reiterate that the ban applies to all open fires in Alberta's forest protection areas, counties, MDs, and special areas such as provincial parks and recreation areas; that is to say, Crown land. The cities of Calgary and Edmonton, among many others across the province, also have their own municipal fire bans in effect. It is really crucial at this point that all Albertans respect those fire bans so that we can protect the safety of our communities.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Business Regulations

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, a nonprofit organization in my riding was required to bring potable water into their RV park as a requirement for getting their operating licence this year. The initial quote was for \$4,000, but what began as a simple request by one department turned into a multidepartmental fiasco with a price tag of \$20,000 to \$80,000. Bureaucratic red tape hurts businesses, plain and simple. Every province except Alberta has a red tape reduction strategy. Will the government commit to a red tape strategy, yes or no?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. Of course, one of the reasons why we have regulations is to protect each other and to make sure that citizens can be safe. Some things that might be referred to as red tape are simply security measures to make sure that individuals don't speed on highways, don't sell alcohol to minors. These are things that we certainly are proud of. If there are specific instances that the member would like to raise, we certainly would be willing to have those conversations.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, probably the first problem is to learn what red tape is.

A few points to ponder, Mr. Speaker. Given that the CFIB has given the Alberta government a D grade for its red tape report card for several years and given that they estimate that red tape costs Alberta businesses over \$4 billion a year, will the current government at least recognize here and now that bureaucratic red tape is a massive hidden tax on businesses and all Albertans and that they need to address this?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there are reasons why we need to protect citizens and protect businesses. Again, if there are specific instances that the member wants to bring up rather than spouting grandiose ideas that are created off the back of a napkin, I'd certainly be happy to discuss specific instances that he's referring to. But there are reasons why we have regulations and protections for citizens: to make sure that they're protected and so are the businesses.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, we see again that it's easier to attack the opposition than to answer the question.

Given that provinces like British Columbia get an A rating from CFIB on red tape reduction because they keep track of the regulatory burden and given that even other provinces, like Ontario, that share a high-spending agenda still manage to have a red tape reduction framework, will the current government here at least commit to quarterly reports on red tape reduction or a one-for-one rule on introducing new regulations?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, certainly, I think it's fair to ask why we have regulations, and one of the reasons why we have regulations is to protect citizens. When it comes to: will you guarantee that you'll get rid of a regulation if you add a regulation? Not if the regulations are there to protect citizens. Certainly, we take our responsibility in that matter very seriously.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

2:40

Seniors' Housing

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Albertans we care greatly about our senior population, especially all those who are currently displaced. For all seniors across the province we want to ensure that they have housing available to them so that they can age as comfortably and carefree as possible. We need to take measures today to ensure that the infrastructure we need in 20 years is available because we have done the planning now. To the minister of seniors: what studies are you conducting to ensure that infrastructure is planned and developed for current and upcoming senior populations?

The Speaker: The Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. I'll just address some of the concerns regarding Fort McMurray currently. I've met with Cynthia Woodford, who is the vice-president of property services at Wood Buffalo Housing & Development Corporation. I want to commend them on their efforts in the evacuation and in the face of adversity, and I'm really pleased with the work they've done. We know that the Rotary House Lodge was not destroyed. Of course, we have to make sure that all the other infrastructure needs are in place, so we're working very closely with the authority right now to make sure that seniors in Fort McMurray are protected.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you have announced capital dollars but have not announced any process for accessing the funding and given that partnering with private and nonprofit sectors is likely the most effective method to build and renovate seniors' facilities in Alberta, to the minister: when will an application process be in place so that private industry can apply to create this much-needed infrastructure?

The Speaker: The Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. Of course, we do have a \$1.2 billion investment in our five-year capital plan, and unlike the previous government, we are addressing the concerns about \$1 billion in deferred maintenance that we inherited from that government. We're investing \$582 million to support major replacement and renewal of existing social housing and seniors' lodges. We've put money into rental assistance: \$1.3 million will be provided for immediate support for approximately 260 families to . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that as the population shifts over the upcoming years, the use of specific facilities will inevitably change – and the needs of seniors using them will – and given that we want to make best possible use of the infrastructure that we build, to the minister: what is your plan for ensuring that both private and public facilities built for seniors' housing can be repurposed in the future if or when they no longer serve the need so that we make sure that we do not waste taxpayers' dollars?

Ms Sigurdson: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, the seniors' facilities, many of them, you know, are 30, 40 years old. There has to be some redevelopment of them, and actually some of them are no longer functional. Of course, they have to be brought up to modern standards. That's why we're investing \$30 million this year into bringing seniors' lodges up to code to make sure that by 2018 a hundred facilities will have sprinkler systems and all the fire safety that they need. Other work that we're doing is making lodges have their own in-suite . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Women's Economic Equality

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I look back at my childhood, I remember the hours my mother put in at home in the morning getting me ready for school and in the evenings ensuring that I was well fed and cared for while at the same time holding down a job for which she was being paid 30 per cent less than her male counterparts. This problem of the wage gap is still with us today. To the Minister of Status of Women: what steps are being taken by this government to address the gender pay gap in this province?

The Speaker: The Minister of Status of Women.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to member for the timely question as we go into Status of Women estimates this afternoon. Alberta's women are strong and capable. That's why it makes no sense that we have one of the largest pay gaps in the country. We know that 62 per cent of minimum wage earners in Alberta are

women, and our plan to responsibly phase in a \$15 minimum wage is real progress in closing that wage gap.

Mr. Speaker, we're actually taking women's economic security seriously by creating Alberta's first-ever ministry dedicated to advancing women's equality.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given this economic environment that we're in now, child care is at the forefront of many people's minds, and given that child care spaces are still at a premium, the prices seem to go up during the good times but never come down in the bad. To the same minister: what are you doing to increase the availability and affordability of child care spaces throughout the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Raising kids is expensive. Our government knows that and is committed to helping Alberta families with the costs of child care. We're expanding benefits to 380,000 Alberta kids. This is so that, for example, a single mom with two kids who qualifies will get more than \$3,000 in her pocket each year. We're also investing \$10 million to pilot child care programs so that when finances improve, we will be in a position to move towards \$25-a-day child care for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that an increase in the availability of child care spaces is just one way that we can help increase the ability of women to participate in the workforce, again to the Minister of Status of Women: what are you doing to ensure that women in our province are able to fully participate in the economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Women's economic security is one of the three key areas of Status of Women's mandate. A big part of getting better paying jobs is training and education. We are moving Alberta forward with our jobs plan. In our budget there's \$10 million for training opportunities for women and indigenous people, who are underrepresented in the economy. I'm proud to be a member of a government that is taking real action to help Alberta's strong and resilient women succeed in this economy.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Fort McMurray and Area Wildfire Relief

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past week has been very difficult for residents of Fort McMurray and the entire province as we battled with the single biggest fire in our history. Without a doubt we are going through a stressful and trying time.

I am humbled and touched by the resilient spirit of my fellow Albertans who have stepped in to support with whatever they can. From complete strangers bringing flowers to brighten up Mother's Day for moms staying in reception centres to schoolteachers driving students to safety through the heart of the blaze, from hundreds of firefighters battling the blaze around the clock to peace officers directing traffic in thick smoke and staff from the SPCA working to remove all the animals abandoned during the city-wide exodus, everyone is working as quickly as possible with all they can give to

get resources and services where they are needed. In my own constituency of Wetaskiwin-Camrose people have donated generously to relief efforts and held the people of Fort McMurray in their thoughts.

This is a disaster of extreme magnitude, and I am proud that our government is doing the right thing, showing clear leadership, and ensuring we meet the needs that people have. People's safety comes first, and that's what we have prioritized.

When tens of thousands were being forced from their homes as firefighters battled the wildfire, two beautiful babies were born in an evacuation camp. At just a week old today, Mr. Speaker, they are at least two rays of sunshine amid the smoky devastation.

Fort McMurray, please know that we have your back and we will get through this difficult time together. Like the phoenix, we will rise from the ashes. Thank you to all ordinary Albertans for performing extraordinary acts of compassion.

Thank you.

2:50 Fort McMurray and Area Wildfire Relief

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, history has been punctuated with moments of greatness performed by regular people. The spark of heroism lies dormant in all of us until that urgent whisper calls us to step up, suppress our fears and our own self-interest, and do something significant and meaningful. Pictures of caring Albertans coming to the rescue of fleeing motorists stranded on the highway remind us of the hero lying dormant in each of us, waiting for that quiet moment when we see a need and instinctively reach out with a helping hand and a caring heart. Pictures of brave firefighters trying to recover from exhaustion, lying on the lawn bone weary from battling insurmountable odds, fighting to save homes and possessions. These images will be indelibly etched in our memories for years and years to come.

They came from far and wide, not because they were paid to or required to but because they saw the Goliath for what it was, an inferno whose sole purpose was to wreak carnage and destruction wherever it went. What do heroes do when they are confronted with the Goliaths of the world, Mr. Speaker? They steel their nerves, they take a deep breath, and they plant their feet to stand bravely in defiance.

Many of Fort McMurray's homes and businesses now stand safe from the fiery tendrils due to the gutsy and courageous efforts of those unsung and unheralded heroes. To all of you first responders that ran towards the fire when everyone else was running away from it, to all of you angels in pickups that brought gas cans and food and water to the stranded on highway 63, to all of you volunteers and givers of charity, to all of you who offered heartfelt prayers for the safety of the displaced: from the bottom of our hearts we say thank you. You answered the quiet call of heroism that moved you to action in this great time of need. Goliath reared its ugly head, but you brave souls were courageously there to stop it.

Mr. Speaker, I am proudest to report to you that in Alberta heroism and leadership are still very much alive and well.

Fort McMurray and Area Wildfire Relief

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, over the past week Albertans watched in horror as the raging wildfire forced more than 80,000 Fort McMurray and area residents from their homes, leaving unimaginable destruction in its wake. In the face of this danger it would have been easy to panic, yet so many brave Albertans swallowed their fear and evacuated their city without incident. In the hours and days that followed, it has been remarkable to witness the strength, kindness, and generosity of Albertans as they rush to help evacuees.

Whether it was patrolling highway 63 with fuel, food, and water for those stranded or opening their homes without hesitation to welcome the weary or quickly organizing fundraisers to support the amazing work of the Canadian Red Cross, Albertans have been a source of inspiration across the country.

Time and time again our resiliency has been tested, and Albertans have answered the call. I think about the wonderful couple from Fort Mac that I met this weekend in Calgary, so overwhelmed and in shock but who were treated so kindly at a local Best Buy, whose staff replaced their electronics at little or no cost, or the group of young people from Fort McMurray who came to North Star Ford in Calgary to say thank you to volunteers, who then furnished them with food and supplies for their pets.

Unfortunately, we cannot say that no lives were lost. Our hearts break for the families of two young people who lost their lives in a vehicle collision fleeing Fort McMurray. This is an unimaginable loss, and our prayers are with their families.

Alberta is no stranger to hard times, but as the people of this great province have demonstrated so many times in the past, we are stronger than tornadoes, floods, and wildfires.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Peace River Constituency Events

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I went home early to High Level this past weekend due to wildfire evacuations and a local state of emergency. Thankfully, fires are currently under control and people are safe, but my visit really highlighted the incredible, resilient northern spirit.

Friday morning I had the honour of speaking at the Northern HEAT conference in Peace River, where firefighters from across northwest Alberta improve their skills and efficiency through live fire training and sessions on engine company operations and leadership. When you stand in front of a roomful of such brave men and women, knowing each and every one is ready and willing to face wildfire and risk their own lives to keep the rest of us safe, there isn't a lot you can say except: thank you for always being there when we need you.

A key conference session was on posttraumatic stress disorder, something that affects both the victims of wildfire and first responders. By taking early steps to address mental health concerns among those impacted by the fires in northern Alberta, we can hopefully lessen the severity of posttraumatic effects.

Saturday brought a lesson in how to stay mentally healthy in the face of trauma at the Northern Alberta Fiddling and Jigging Championship in Fort Vermilion. We had a sold-out crowd, with participants from across northern Alberta. First up was Marvin, a fiddler from Fort McMurray. Marvin stood on stage, and he spoke about losing everything in the fire, including all his fiddles and guitars. Then he picked up a borrowed fiddle and lifted the hearts of everyone in the room with his music, celebrating life through music and dance and healing our soul and spirit.

I saw incredible generosity. Although the economic downturn has hit Peace River hard, within 48 hours residents had filled a huge box truck with emergency relief supplies. The mayor of High Level has reached out to the province to offer accommodation for evacuees, stating: we have 1,000 rooms and big arms to support.

In the days ahead we'll have much work to do in northern Alberta as we begin our journey of rebuilding, but with the strength and bravery of our first responders, the generosity of people across the province and country, our focus on maintaining mental wellness, and our incredibly resilient northern spirit, we will succeed.

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

Edmonton Eskimos' Community Activities

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise and speak about an amazing group of women and our city's favourite team, the Edmonton Eskimos.

Recently it was my pleasure to spend the evening at the Edmonton Eskimos dinner, which raises money for the Lois Hole hospital and ovarian cancer research. This event is hosted every year in memory of long-time Eskimo friend and employee Pam Monastyrskyj. Pam was an integral member of the Green and Gold for more than two decades. In 2005 she lost her long, hard-fought battle with ovarian cancer. Two years later the Edmonton Eskimos Women's Dinner was created in her memory to provide funding for research at the Lois Hole hospital for women. This dinner has raised \$392,000 to date, including over \$59,000 in 2015 alone. This is one of the many things that the Edmonton Eskimos do to give back to the community.

As many of you know, Fort McMurray has a special place in the Green and Gold's hearts. Last summer the oil sands capital hosted the Northern Kickoff between the Saskatchewan Roughriders and the Edmonton Eskimos in a preseason match. This game was a huge success and developed an everlasting relationship between the CFL and Fort McMurray, so much so that the players, the Eskimos Cheer Team, and the mascots all visited the evacuees currently housed at the Northlands Expo Centre this past Saturday.

This team has also participated in a \$50,000 donation made by all nine teams of the CFL and the league office to the Red Cross and has also donated to the Edmonton Humane Society's disaster fund to support affected animals. The Edmonton Eskimos and their volunteers continue to make significant contributions not only in support of great initiatives like the women's dinner but also through their ongoing support of the evacuees of Fort McMurray.

In closing, I will quote the commissioner of the CFL. "They have been our gracious hosts. They are our friends. And most importantly, they are our fellow Canadians. All of our teams, and I know all of our fans, wish them safe passage and in time a full recovery from this crisis."

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that we accept unanimous consent in order to extend the Routine until its completion. It's my expectation that that will only take a few additional minutes. Of course, there are some bills that need to be introduced, so I would respectfully request the House's support for that.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Energy Industry Response to Fort McMurray Wildfire

Mr. Strankman: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Albertans never cease to amaze me. We are currently in the middle of battling one of the most devastating natural disasters in our history as the fire near Fort McMurray is still going strong. Thankfully, the courage of Fort McMurray's residents, emergency personnel, and helpful Albertans ensured a successful evacuation when the city was threatened. I want to talk today about some of those helpful Albertans, especially members of our energy sector.

Now, the energy sector in our province is often demonized by those with an agenda. In this emergency oil field companies and their employees are acting selflessly to provide emergency lodging, food, and, in many cases, transportation for displaced residents. For example, at the height of the mass exodus from Fort McMurray men such as Kurt Scharr and his friends, self-named the Power Strokes, loaded their trailer with Tidy Tanks and jerry cans of fuel and drove towards the fire when everyone else was evacuating. Likewise, Shawn McDonald and his company, Black Scorpion, ran up and down highway 881 and highway 63 providing fuel not only to stranded motorists but even sometimes to emergency responder vehicles. They did so for days, paying for the fuel out of pocket and through donations. Only Albertans would run with gasoline and diesel towards a fire. These folks knew that many people leaving in a hurry likely didn't have a chance to fill their tanks, so they loaded up of their own accord and began helping stranded Albertans get out of harm's way.

3:00

These are just a few of many stories of our friends and neighbours stepping up and pitching in because it was the right thing to do, with no agenda beyond helping others. Mr. Speaker, I would like to think that these responses are typical of how Albertans act in a crisis. It takes a special kind of person to knowingly place themselves in a dangerous situation. These men and women and others like them exemplify what it means to be Alberta strong.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice pursuant to Standing Order 15(2) that at the appropriate time I will be rising on a point of privilege regarding the obstruction of the government in preventing members of the Assembly, in particular the Official Opposition, including myself, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, and the MLA for Drayton Valley-Devon, from carrying out their parliamentary duties. I have the appropriate number of copies of the letter that was provided to your office at the required time this morning. Subsequently, I understand that there may be a response from the government, at which point I may be happy to withdraw this point of privilege.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 13

Veterinary Profession Amendment Act, 2016

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and introduce Bill 13, Veterinary Profession Amendment Act, 2016.

These proposed changes will allow veterinary technologists to be given representation on the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association's governing council and practice review board with full voting rights. This is important because the association is responsible for setting and enforcing the rules around the practice of veterinary medicine in Alberta. The amendments introduced today in Bill 13 were initiated by the ABVMA with member support, and I'd like to thank them for being here in the gallery today. The amendments will not change the scope of practice for veterinary medicine or the qualifications required to be a technologist. By enhancing accountability for all technologists,

Albertans can be confident their animals are receiving the best care possible.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Bill 14

Health Professions Amendment Act, 2016

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise in this House to introduce first reading of Bill 14, Health Professions Amendment Act, 2016.

It's first reading, and it's also my first bill, so this is pretty exciting. Thank you.

The Health Professions Act delegates professional self-governance and regulatory colleges and establishes standard processes for registration, continuing competency, complaints, and discipline. The proposed amendments reflect Alberta's changing and evolving health workforce and health system. The amendments will ensure that Albertans continue to receive safe, high-quality care from regulated, accountable professionals. The amendments will also ensure that this care is delivered in facilities that meet consistent, rigorous standards, part of our right care, right place, right time, right professional.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table 10 copies of a response to a written request from the fall session respecting government spending in regard to student learning assessment pilot projects. I'd also like to take a moment to apologize to the member for the delay in providing my ministry's response. I understand that the member has asked a similar question in the spring session, and I would assure him that we will table that response and all of his other requests in a more timely manner.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table 10 copies of the responses prepared by Alberta Health to written questions and motions for returns submitted last session, and I, too, would like to apologize for the delay in providing these to the House.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Mason, Minister of Infrastructure, return to order of the Assembly Motion for a Return 9, asked for by Mr. Cooper on May 2, 2016, copies of all ministerial orders issued by the Ministry of Infrastructure between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2015.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe there was a point of privilege that was raised by the Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today on the point of privilege that I had mentioned earlier in question period. I'd just like to extend my acceptance of the apology

from both ministers. I appreciate the fact that they have tabled the required information and apologized. I am more than happy at this time to withdraw my point of privilege. However, I'd just make a brief comment to make sure that the government is aware that their actions, or inaction, affect other members of this Assembly, and it's important for all of us to ensure that the rules of the Assembly as well as the standing of the Assembly are respected, and I appreciate that they have done that now today.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the daily Routine has now concluded.

A legislative policy committee will convene this afternoon for consideration of the main estimates. Families and Communities will consider the estimates for Status of Women in the Grassland Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:09 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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