



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, May 18, 2016

Day 30

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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

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Party standings:

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

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| Kazim | |

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, May 18, 2016

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect, each in our own way. Many cultures have traditional ceremonies intended to bring rain. Perhaps if we direct our united thoughts and energies together, Mother Nature will cooperate and some much-needed rain will bring relief to our neighbours up north and first responders, who are working so tirelessly to keep our communities safe.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 14

Health Professions Amendment Act, 2016

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Madam Speaker, thank you. I am pleased to move second reading of Bill 14, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2016.

The Health Professions Act has an important role in Alberta's health care system. It is central to ensuring that our province's health system remains second to none. It ensures the system and health providers working within the system maintain a commitment to excellence and to providing unparalleled care. It is one of the cornerstones upon which our foundation of quality health care is based.

How does the legislation achieve these aims? The act is a legislative framework through which regulatory colleges partner with government to create accountability mechanisms in our health system. Through this system nearly 100,000 regulated health professionals are held accountable for their practice. These accountability mechanisms are in place to protect Albertans. These mechanisms ensure that Albertans are provided with the best possible health care services, delivered in a safe manner by highly qualified health professionals.

Through the act processes are put in place to assure Albertans that health providers have the required knowledge and skills to capably provide care, complete ongoing education and training to maintain these skills to stay current, and to follow best practices and adhere to standards of practice and a code of ethics, which ensures that health professionals provide highly professional, competent care in a responsible, respectful way.

If a health provider does not provide care that meets quality and safety standards, Albertans have a means of recourse. They may choose to file a complaint with the appropriate regulatory college. Regulatory colleges, in turn, have systems of investigation and discipline in place should they be required. Public members serve on the councils of these regulatory colleges so that the views of Albertans are represented and reflected in decisions made by the health professionals.

However, the Health Professions Act has not been amended in eight years. During that time Alberta's health system and health workforce have continued to evolve. Patient expectations have

changed, and professional roles have changed. Gaps, deficiencies, or better ways to deliver care have been identified and the need for improvements brought forward.

To ensure that the act remains current and continues to protect Albertans, amendments are required. These amendments involve adding two new professions so these health providers can be regulated under the act and be accountable for the care they provide; giving the Minister of Health the authority to determine a body to accredit medical facilities so that consistent, rigorous standards can be applied; allowing for new care models by removing ownership restrictions; providing for name changes that more clearly delineate roles; protecting more professional titles so Albertans can be assured that only qualified individuals are permitted to use these titles and provide the corresponding services; and, finally, updating a profession's description of its roles and responsibilities in order to reflect expanding scopes of practice.

I'd like to take a moment to address the amendment that proposes adding two professions to the act; specifically, physician assistants and diagnostic medical sonographers. The position of physician assistant is relatively new to Alberta. These professionals have only been working in the province since 2013. There are currently 30 physician assistants on the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta's voluntary register, and 12 work for Alberta Health Services. They independently assess and treat patients, and their responsibilities under physician supervision may range from conducting patient interviews and physical examinations to diagnosing and treating illnesses and providing selected diagnostic and therapeutic procedures. In this role they increase access to health care by giving physicians time for more complex patients.

With regard to diagnostic medical sonographers, there are about 800 working in Alberta at this time. Diagnostic medical sonographers perform sonographic examinations, or ultrasounds. In 2013 approximately 270,000 ultrasound exams were performed at AHS facilities, and more than 900,000 were performed in community clinics across Alberta. Adding these professions to the act means they will be regulated and accountable for the care they provide.

By making these changes, regulatory colleges and their members will be better served by this legislation. That, in turn, means Albertans will be better served by their health providers. We must ensure this act captures what our health professions need in order to do their work effectively. At the same time, we need to ensure that Albertans continue to be protected when they seek health services in our province. Regulating health professionals means they are obligated to maintain high standards of competency, safety, and ethics and provide Albertans with high-quality care. It also means health professionals are accountable for the care they provide and that members of the public are protected. For health professionals the act provides them opportunities to work to their full scope of practice and for their skills to be fully utilized in the health system. The proposed amendments will update the act and at the same time reinforce the important safeguards this legislation provides.

I ask all members to support this bill and move it to the next stage. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity to speak to Bill 14, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2016, and the many changes it introduces. This is a bill I will be supporting. Of course, I will be speaking to some of the more prominent

amendments to the Health Professions Act, but I'd like to start by addressing the importance of this act in more general terms.

Bill 14 is quite heavy with changes across a number of different health professions and schedules within the HPA, and much of it is a matter of legislative housekeeping, but many of these schedule amendments are a matter of bringing the standards of practice, titles, and categories of members up to date, which, of course, is an important part of any housekeeping.

Medical fields are constantly evolving and changing with the times, and it's important that our legislation governing these professions keeps current with today's and best practices. It is my understanding that the Health Professions Act has not undergone a major update since 2008, so it's time for a welcome facelift. The Health Professions Act has been, I think, largely successful in its intended purpose of providing the legislative framework for self-regulation of our health professionals in Alberta. If I'm not mistaken, we have 28 distinct regulatory colleges that are governed under this act, with still three governed under the Health Disciplines Act but outlined in the Health Professions Act as well.

9:10

I've heard it said that one of the strengths of our system is that a large number of the health professions we have working here are self-regulated under this legislation. I would suggest that self-regulation provides a number of successes in our province, and ultimately that is really the benefit to Albertans.

That brings me to the central, key point in this discussion. These colleges exist for Albertans. They exist to govern the best interests of the public, providing Albertans with the necessary protections and accountability mechanisms. Regulatory colleges in their service to the public provide standards of practice, codes of ethics, standards for registration of members, continuing competence, and mechanisms for holding members to account if discipline becomes necessary. These are functions which are well provided under our and under a self-regulatory framework. When the self-regulatory framework is doing what it should, we can all have confidence in the quality of the health services Albertans receive. While this bill is quite dense and thorough, it is very critical to how our health system actually works at the ground level.

One of the most significant changes that we find here is the regulation of physician assistants under the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta. My understanding is that these physician assistants, who do work under the supervision of a physician, are not particularly numerous in our health system, maybe a few dozen or so. I believe that you'll see them more commonly in military settings, and I think we have some of them practising here who were foreign trained as well. I've actually had the pleasure to meet with a few since taking on my Health critic role, and they definitely do play an important, crucial part in our system. From what I can tell and from what I've heard from Albertans, it's a good move to formally pull them under the membership of the college. Doing so should provide some opportunities for further integration into the system and really work toward involving them in being able to utilize the full scope of their practice and of their capability.

It's important that any health professional be maximized to their full potential, but again the entirety of the Health Professions Act is about serving, serving the best interests of the public, and that's the core goal of any legislative change that we discuss today and most days. By all means, this change does serve the public well.

On the topic of the College of Physicians & Surgeons I also note the change to schedule 21 in section 8.1(2). This is noted on page 16 of the bill, whereby the minister – the minister – is granted the discretion to direct the college to be the accreditation for certain health facilities. Madam Speaker, my understanding is that the way

things are currently written in the act, government facilities are exempted from requiring this accreditation. While they often do seek and get accredited anyway, this change here in Bill 14 gives the minister the authority to make that happen as the minister deems necessary.

If I were to use the example of a diagnostic lab, every nongovernment lab requires this accreditation from the College of Physicians & Surgeons. It's not hard to see why. Doctors rely heavily on lab services to do their jobs, and both the doctor and the public must have the utmost trust in the accuracy and safety of these services. So if this change gives an added tool to the minister to direct government facilities to have and meet the same standard, Madam Speaker, that's a welcome development. Albertans must have absolute confidence in all the systems and facilities working for us.

Moving on to the Alberta College of Medical Diagnostic and Therapeutic Technologists, we see sonographers, or ultrasound technicians as we might more commonly know them, being added under schedule 12 of the Health Professions Act. Again, Madam Speaker, this is a good move for the sake of the profession but, more importantly, a move that will serve the public well. As a bit of an aside, if you find me coming back to this issue of how to best serve the interests of the public again and again, of course, it's for good reason. The entire theme of the Health Professions Act revolves around this core principle. In any case, adding stenographers under the umbrella of the diagnostic profession is another move that may just seem simple on its face, but it's important. It's important to good self-regulation of our health professions.

Under schedule 20 we find a number of changes regarding physiotherapy. The most notable is the removal of the restriction around physical therapy corporations. Bill 14 does away with the requirement that 75 per cent of shareholders of a physical therapy corporation be regulated members of the college of physiotherapists. Madam Speaker, this is an appropriate change when we consider the purpose and scope of the Health Professions Act. The Health Professions Act is not a business organization act. From what I understand, this is a holdover from many years ago and no longer needs to be in the Health Professions Act. Frankly, it's not appropriate to have it in there in any case. As the framework that protects the public, it's not necessary or helpful for the Health Professions Act to regulate ownership shares here. By all accounts, easing this restriction should make it easier for physiotherapists to work in joint practices with other health professionals.

I'd like to conclude by speaking a little bit about the topic that we've discussed in the past in the context of other issues, and that is the appropriateness of joint associations and colleges. I think it's a worthwhile conversation to have as there are two bodies that will undergo a formal name change to encompass both the college and association title. Those are, of course, the Alberta college and association of opticians and the Physiotherapy Alberta College and Association. Now, I certainly don't mean to single out any organizations or imply any misconduct or impropriety. It's just that these legislative changes here before us provide a jumping-off point where we can have a bit of a broader philosophical discussion about the nature – Madam Speaker, about the nature – of a professional association versus a regulatory college.

To beat a dead horse one more time here, these self-regulating colleges exist to protect and serve the public interest. Self-regulating colleges exist to protect and serve the public interest, whereas a professional association exists to serve the profession and its members. A professional association exists in a voluntary capacity. Members join specifically because they derive benefits. Don't get me wrong, Madam Speaker. Both functions and organizations are absolutely important for the overall health of a

profession. However, it seems to me that these functions are better served when they are entirely separate. Inevitably, the mixing of lobbying and regulating can pose challenges or at the very least pose a problem with public perception. While a college regulates its members for the sake of the public, the public trust must also exist. The public needs the assurance that their interests will not be muddled or forgotten or prioritized any lower.

9:20

Again, it needs to be said that this principle of not mixing the two functions is not a slight toward either of the organizations under our consideration today. In fact, I'm assured that the lines are clearly drawn and that the financial interests of members and discussions around fees are not – are not, Madam Speaker – the concern of these two colleges. Given the largely out-of-pocket nature of the payment model for physiotherapy and optician services, the negotiation of fees may not be a significant factor in the first place. The addition of association services fills more of a role for professional education and development in the aforementioned colleges, which are things that may not be fulfilled otherwise if there were an absence of a professional association. Obviously, there may be some extenuating circumstances here, and I'm sure they do a fine, excellent job regulating their respective professions, but it's still beneficial. It's still good to debate the broader principle in this House.

There is also an opportunity here to bring evidence and case studies and have a little cross-jurisdictional review to help us consider best practice and apply it to Alberta. I want to bring up the case of British Columbia and the way that they have structured their own Health Professions Act and colleges. Madam Speaker, in 2001 the Health Professions Council was tasked with making recommendations to the B.C. Health minister about the regulation of health professions and produced a report. The report was called *Safe Choices: A New Model for Regulating Health Professions in British Columbia*, 645 pages. I won't table the whole thing here today, perhaps just a relevant part of the relationship between regulatory bodies and professional associations. The report drew on both the earlier Foulkes report and the Seaton Commission.

I'll quote the Seaton Commission, which recommended that two separate bodies be created for all regulated or licensed professions so that there is a clear separation of membership promotion functions and licensing and discipline functions.

Madam Speaker, now from the Foulkes report.

It is only reasonable to recognize that professions, like other groups and individuals in society, may well be expected to have certain private self-interests of their own which are not coincident with the public interest . . . This important distinction between the public function of the licensing body and the private function of the voluntary association is now widely recognized in Canada. From the standpoint of both the professions and the public, it is desirable that the separation of the two functions be kept sharp and distinct.

The council went on to say that it agreed with these statements about the clear separation.

In another section about mandatory membership, Madam Speaker, the council concluded that

it is not in the public interest for members of a regulated health profession to be required to belong, or to pay dues, for that matter, to a professional association.

Interestingly, you'll find that in B.C. today health regulatory colleges do not include any professional association overlap. They do not include any professional association overlap. The two bodies are kept distinct in all cases.

Also of note is that similar recommendations have been made here in Alberta. The 2004 Health Professions Act Employer's

Handbook notes the following recommendation of the Health Workforce Rebalancing Committee.

Enhanced mechanisms to avoid conflicts of interest, including the separation of "college" and "association" functions.

Despite this, Madam Speaker, we still don't see the total separation here in Alberta as they do in B.C.

Madam Speaker and members of the House, I hope I've been able to provide some evidence and reasoning on this topic. I think it's well worth discussing as we move forward with this bill on updates.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek to close debate.

Ms Woollard: Madam Speaker, I think we are all agreed that the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2016, is an action that it's time for, it needs taking. It will help to clarify and better organize and update the Health Professions Act.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 12

Aboriginal Consultation Levy Repeal Act

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a few quick points. I believe that it is indeed worth noting for members of this Chamber and those beyond these walls that the previous Progressive Conservative government introduced Bill 22 with the goal of increasing the effectiveness of public consultation with our indigenous communities. We recognize that there were some issues with the legislation. The then PC cabinet actually approved the steps to repeal the bill, which, I might point out, was never proclaimed in the first place. The NDP are simply following through on this commitment, which will benefit all Albertans, and we support their efforts in this respect.

Over the years previous governments have made tremendous progress when it comes to building relationships with Alberta's indigenous communities. In fact, Alberta was one of the first jurisdictions to recognize Métis rights, way back in the 1980s, and to fund basic services on reserves regardless of jurisdiction, including education and disaster assistance. Many people recall the floods of just a few years ago as a great example of that.

Now, that said, we recognize that there is always room for improvement, and the repeal of Bill 22 would be a step in the right direction. I say this with respect: given the government's difficulty with the adequate consultation processes they've engaged upon in the last year or so, we really urge the Premier and the Minister of Indigenous Relations to work closely with our FNMI communities and individuals clear across Alberta so that they can indeed develop an effective consultation framework.

Thank you. I just thought it was worth pointing out those points of information and clarification, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm thankful to get the opportunity to stand and talk about Bill 12, the Aboriginal Consultation Levy Repeal Act, today in the House. I have a lot to say in regard to this bill but first want to express that I am completely in support of repealing the former government's Bill 22, the Aboriginal Consultation Levy Act.

Unfortunately, Bill 22 was introduced by the minister without enough consultation from either indigenous groups or industry, and it brought further problems to the table, so to speak. Wildrose voted against Bill 22 originally because after listening to indigenous groups and industry proponents, we recognized that the former government was not listening to stakeholders and to all Albertans. It was faulty from the start, and too many hours were spent on the bill that was misguided. Treaty 6 and Treaty 8 leaders felt that the bill was discriminatory and that non-aboriginal people did not have to disclose any of their agreements with proponents. They also felt that the government was overstepping its constitutional authority.

Even though I am glad that the previous government's work will be repealed and that the government has promised that it will work to develop a new consultation process, I do have some concerns with how this government may or may not hold those consultations. I truly hope that the government will acknowledge the lessons this failed legislation has to teach us. My worry is that once this legislation is out of the way and new consultation policies are brought forth, the government will not take the time to get it right. My fear is that they will not make sure that it is in the best interest of all of those affected.

9:30

An Hon. Member: Fearmongering.

Mr. Hanson: Excuse me?

Government has a responsibility to consult with all First Nations, and in dealing with this particular policy area, they also need to collaborate with representatives of industry at the table with First Nations representatives.

This NDP government is in the habit of breaking trust with Albertans. In order to build trust, one must encourage a relationship with all partners. This government needs to engage with all indigenous groups and proponents and really delve into matters that concern both and continue to work until both are satisfied.

We also know that the government has signed a new protocol agreement with Treaty 8 and that the government has planned to do the same with Treaty 6 and Treaty 7. However, the process was not really open and transparent. Much can be left to the imagination for all other stakeholders, and they have felt out of the loop. While I believe that it's important to have certain expectations in place and have good, solid consultation policies in place, I also think that it is just as vitally important to have action in critical areas and certainty for communities. After reading the new protocol agreement between the government and Treaty 8 and seeing the many tables dealing with different matters of concern, it was interesting to see and I look forward to hearing the results of these negotiations.

I understand that the First Nations consultation capacity investment program is there and in place to help provide consultation funding to First Nations when they need it, but we would like to know: when will the minister be announcing his plans for a new consultation policy, and will you give indigenous groups and industry the time they need to do the necessary research and planning that will need to be done on their end in order to collaborate effectively?

We are most certain that many groups that were involved were not happy with the way legislation went down last time, and I don't think I need to tell you that communication is key. The aboriginal consultation levy was intended to create a fund that would support consultation between First Nations in Alberta and industry proponents, to try to make sure that all parties were well prepared and equipped for negotiations so that energy projects could proceed in a way that benefited everyone. An excellent goal but one that has not yet been achieved.

Right now the last thing Alberta needs is for this government to further destabilize our economy by upsetting the business environment. Madam Chair, the minister needs to get this right this time. The government has made enough mistakes that have hurt Albertans and their pocketbooks with their high-risk ideological practices. This government needs to get this right, and if the legislation isn't beneficial or useful, then this government should be prepared to act swiftly instead of allowing it to sit on the books indefinitely.

The indigenous annual report from 2014-15 indicated that the Aboriginal Consultation Levy Act would not be implemented since it did not meet the needs of the communities. We all know for a fact that both indigenous people and industry were not happy with Bill 22, and since we are aware that this government has committed to a new consultation policy, we need to make sure they completely understand that not getting this right in this go-round will not be acceptable. Hurting Albertans further when they're already down would not be good practice.

Another area that I would like to address is the announcement of the Métis settlements consultation policy. I would think that any stakeholder that might be involved with that work should be properly prepared and given ample time to reflect on anything this minister brings to the table. It is vital not only for this minister's relationship with all stakeholders but for industry and indigenous groups to have meaningful discussions on the future of all Albertans. Relationships need to be based on trust in order to be meaningful. We know that a lot of Albertans are feeling the effects of broken promises and risky ideologies that have been implemented by and through this NDP government.

Madam Chair, these relationships need to be restored in order for this vital work to be done. My hope is that the government will not repeat the same mistakes that were made in Bill 22. Let's not have any group feel that they were discriminated against or left out of the process. I do worry that the next consultation policy will only reflect this government's agenda, so I ask that it please acknowledge the previous failures and work to make sure that industry proponents and all Albertans are included and that the mistakes of Bill 22 do not happen again.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you. It's a pleasure to rise in this House today to talk about Bill 12, the Aboriginal Consultation Levy Repeal Act. Alberta has a duty to consult First Nations when government decisions may adversely affect their constitutionally protected treaty rights. We are committed to enhancing the capacity of First Nations to meaningfully participate in the consultation process, and it's important that we do that. The repeal of the Aboriginal Consultation Levy Act will remove a significant barrier, renew the relationships with First Nations, and help to lay the groundwork for more productive discussions with First Nations, which is very important that we do. In addition, repealing Bill 22 allows government to have respectful and reciprocal engagement with First Nations.

During our first year in government we have remained committed to engaging with First Nations in an effort to renew and forge stronger relationships. In West Yellowhead I've continued to do that. The issue up in Grande Cache is long, and the First Nations peoples there are disgruntled and very unhappy. At first they wouldn't even meet with us because of the previous failings in what had gone on, failings in consultation.

Consultation involves the part of listening, and they haven't been listened to. This is the problem. We have to change our attitude, the way in which we listen to these people because their governance and the way they conduct themselves are different from ours; so I found out. It's taken a considerable amount of time in meeting with them to gain their respect so that we can truly consult with them. The main issue here is us not telling them what we want to hear. It's us having the respect to listen to what they have to say and taking that information to determine what is in the best interest that they have, and we haven't done that. We have failed them in Grande Cache.

The previous government created a committee that supposedly would look after all the interests of the First Nations in the Grande Cache area, and they failed to do that. The committee decided that they would have representation from everybody there, but it wasn't truly representation, so many groups up there weren't represented at all. This is a problem. It's taken a considerable amount of time to meet with them and understand what it is that they want. Like I said at the start, they didn't even want to meet with us.

Part of the barrier, too, was that some of the elders up there only speak Cree. They only understand Cree, not English or anything else, and that creates a barrier. But when I sat down with one of the elders, through an interpreter I created an area of respect, and through that respect I got a good understanding of what the problem is. That's why I'm saying that we have to respect the way in which they communicate to us, and that is the true meaning of consultation. That is what we need to do, listen and understand.

Repealing Bill 22 establishes the guideline and the start so that we can do that in a respectful manner. I urge everybody in this House to support Bill 12, and I close with that. Thank you.

9:40

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, we will call the vote.

[The clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 1

Promoting Job Creation and Diversification Act

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak on Bill 1, the Promoting Job Creation and Diversification Act. However, over here we kind of know it as the minister of economic development's job description act. The bill, frankly, is a farce. The minister already has all of the powers that are mapped out in this bill. It is rather disappointing to see Bill 1 so vacuous when

typically Bill 1 is used as a flagship piece of legislation by a government. What is truly alarming is the NDP's approach to economic development. It harkens back to a time known as the 1970s. Maybe too many of the members here don't remember back that far.

But I remember a story. I'm going to relate it to you because history tends to repeat itself. This story has to do with what happened in New Brunswick. They had a Premier known as Disco Dick.

An Hon. Member: What?

Mr. MacIntyre: Yeah. Disco Dick Hatfield. He would take the government plane on weekends to Montreal and New York City in the name of economic development – he really did – and there he would dance it up in places like Studio 54, surrounded by celebrities like Mick Jagger, Margaret Trudeau, Truman Capote, Diana Ross, Elton John, and Donna Summer.

At one of these swinging business trips the Premier met an entrepreneur by the name of Malcolm Bricklin. Hatfield lured Malcolm to New Brunswick in 1974, offering easy economic development money. New Brunswickers were going to start making sports cars in Saint John and Minto. The Bricklin SV-1 sports car was believed to be the only vehicle in automotive history at that time to have factory-powered gull-wing doors that opened and closed at a touch of a button as standard equipment. Not even the DeLorean was that advanced. The car came with a built-in roll cage, a fibreglass body with bonded acrylic – this was all brand new in those days in the '70s – and in five glorious safety colours: white, red, orange, suntan, and green, probably olive green to match the bathrooms of the day. The Reynolds-Alberta Museum in Wetaskiwin actually has one of these cars in storage. I recommend that you all go see it.

But problems arose in the production process and the poor management, as you might guess. Some say that the plant could not produce vehicles fast enough to make a profit, and there were rumours that Bricklin was extracting money and funnelling it into his other business operations to keep them afloat. At the end of the day, the company went into receivership, owing the New Brunswick government \$21 million, which in our dollars today would be \$88 million. Only 2,800 cars were ever built. The moral of that economic development story is: don't be a Richard Hatfield. Do not give corporate welfare to private businesses. Do not be picking winners and losers in our economy.

To contrast that story, I want to tell you a story about something we all know as the Alberta advantage. Even in those periods of time we did have some examples of corporate welfare stricken businesses in this province, some of them right here in Edmonton. Madam Chair, the notion of state funding into private business, a simple handout, a grant, a loan, or using the power of a triple-A credit rating – but we don't even have that anymore; we have a double-A credit rating – to provide a loan guarantee is not the role of the state. It is not safe. So please hear me. If the banks, the financial institutions, venture capitalists, wealth funds under management, the people in the money business themselves, even the *Dragons' Den* or the *Shark Tank* will not risk the venture for investment, why should the government risk taxpayers' money?

It is the government's role to create the level playing field environment for entrepreneurs. It is the government's role to provide public infrastructure and a business-friendly regulatory climate that will create jobs and create wealth. That's the role of government. Government should not be in the business of business, and that's what we had when we had the Alberta advantage.

In my estimation, the Alberta advantage had seven pillars that made it successful. The first was honest and straightforward financial accounting, that the government's books be presented in a way that Albertans could make sense of and hold their government to account for. The second pillar was a reasonable, affordable, and sustainable level of government spending. The third was our low debt and our triple-A credit rating. The fourth pillar was our low-tax regime and a business-friendly regulatory environment. The fifth was affordable energy to produce competitively priced goods. The sixth was taking pride in our resource sector rather than seeing it as an embarrassment. The seventh pillar was taking pride in our farmers and ranchers and trusting their stewardship rather than seeing them as some kind of overbearing, endangering slave-drivers in need of a smack down.

The Alberta advantage results? Well, in 1985 Alberta's GDP was \$66.8 billion. Energy made up 36 per cent of that total. Fast-forward 28 years, and our GDP was \$332 billion in 2013, and energy only made up 25 per cent of the economy. That was the result of the Alberta advantage compared to what happened in New Brunswick.

Now, I want to have just one more look at a case study, this one from Nova Scotia. I think this one is very fitting given the way Nova Scotia wanted to travel. Back in 2010 Nova Scotia's government wanted in on the green revolution. They wanted in on the green economy, so they bought a 49 per cent stake in a joint venture with Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering. The plan was to establish a wind turbine tower and blade manufacturing facility at the former Trenton Works steelworks site. To quote the Premier of the day, he said:

Today is an exciting day because this partnership will help create the secure jobs our economy needs, employing up to 500 Nova Scotians within three years. This new facility will also showcase and develop Nova Scotia's leadership in renewable energy and the green economy.

Well, they even had a secured customer. Nova Scotia Power guaranteed them orders for wind turbines to help meet Nova Scotia's green power initiative.

Six years later the whole thing fell apart. No 500 jobs were ever created, the province's 49 per cent stake in the company was worthless, and there were 19 people working there, another fine example of why government should never be in the business of business.

Now we come to Bill 1. Frankly, given the performance record of the minister, who has been pulling down a minister's salary and perks for months now, who has had a \$178 million budget, the performance to date is not one job, but the reward – well, now that minister is getting an even bigger pile of taxpayers' money.

9:50

This government has been in power for one year. They entered the scene just as Alberta was staring down the barrel of the worst job crisis in our history, and the first thought they had to help the situation was to launch a series of frontal attacks on the cost of power in Alberta, copying the destructive electricity policies of Ontario, which have been the single largest factor in driving job-creating industries out of that province. Then to help matters further, they introduced tax after tax after tax during an economic depression, I'll call it. Name me one industry that doesn't have electricity and/or natural gas as an input item into the cost of goods and services. This government, frankly, doesn't know the first thing about creating a job-friendly economic environment, and this piece of legislation is a waste of paper.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was eagerly waiting for this debate. This government doesn't look like they're going to withdraw or amend this bill into something useful. This Bill 1 as it stands is a bill of sarcasm. Therefore, if they need some help in creating more useless bills, I can help you out with that. [interjections] Hang on.

I figure this government can create 20 new bills just like this bill, for each of the other ministries. These bills can be just like Bill 1 except we get a little bit more specific for each ministry. The Minister of Finance's bill would ensure that he has to publish a budget every single year. In that budget it would require the publication of the government's revenue and expenses. Additionally, the bill would require him to spend far past inflation and population growth. In that way, when he racks up \$58 billion of debt in just three years, he can just point to his bill and blame bad, risky, ideological policies. Of course, since balancing the chequebook is an optional requirement for his ministry, it should be legislated in this bill.

For the Minister of Health we can include a line which says that she has to do all the duties of the CEO for Alberta Health Services and that sometimes she can act as CEO in voice mode. There will be an exemption, of course. She doesn't have to do any of the duties that she doesn't want to, especially any that attract unwanted attention. This should include a line that would allow the minister to give health care services to the people of Alberta.

I'm sure we could spend hours and hours of our civil servants' time crafting these very unnecessary bills. We may even create jobs through this process of writing out the job descriptions.

An Hon. Member: Pardon?

Mr. Panda: Yes, really. That's how we can create jobs.

They will get all the details organized and correct, and maybe they could just rewrite the Government Organization Act and put it in there. I'm sure there are lots of ideas in that act, but of course we don't want to provide any existing examples and, instead, build these job descriptions from the ground up.

It could be part of the NDP job-creation plan since they would have to hire more government bureaucrats to find a hole in the legislation that doesn't exist and then fill it up with the exact same dirt that was there before. I know the bureaucracy is already bloated, but this government seems to like to fatten up the bureaucracy and their union friends.

On a side note, and just for *Hansard*, I want people to know that I'm being a hundred per cent sarcastic. I know that members across the aisle probably think I'm serious, and I just wanted to make it known for the people who are reading this after the fact.

I asked the minister on the 3rd of March in question period whether he knew he had these powers listed in the bill, and he said he did. That's the reason these other bills are along the exact same lines as Bill 1, the other bills I am proposing.

For the minister of agriculture, we would allow him to implement safety measures without consulting. The minister can already do whatever he wants without consulting, but by putting it in the bill, Albertans would not be able to protest. They would not be able to protest because the minister could point to his bill and show Albertans that they have no power here. It will also help the NDP carbon tax because there will be fewer people driving to protest and using gas. The icing on the cake is that the rebate will actually cover their expenses if they just stay home and don't use any gasoline.

The minister of environment's bill would have a line that says that every time someone says "economics," she will automatically think that the person said "science." It will just be as if the word "economics" doesn't exist. It might require some brainwashing to

ensure that she never hears the word “economics” and only ever hears the word “science,” but those are minor details, and that can be worked out later, Madam Chair. Her bill would allow her to coauthor books that go against the industry she represents. Additionally, she will be able to legislate that fish do not have to pay any carbon tax because when the fish die, they are completely biodegradable and will give off zero emissions as they rot and have zero effect on the ecosystem if they all die.

On a similar note, we want to legislate that the Minister of Labour doesn't have to table any studies, including minimum wage studies and its economic impacts. This bill will protect the government from facts, criticism, and evidence. Her bill should also state that everyone shall have a job and that to do this, she has to raise the minimum wage by 50 per cent every single year. That way, eventually everyone will be a millionaire on top of having a job.

I know that the details I listed for these bills are a little more in depth than Bill 1. They don't have to have that much detail if you want to keep it along the lines of Bill 1. They're very bad suggestions, but they're suggestions that are in line with Bill 1.

The Minister of Justice would be required to bring justice to the guilty. She would have the freedom to bring justice through the courts or through a league. This would be solely dependent on whether or not there are enough superheroes to create a Justice League. Additionally, her bill should allow her to remove minimum wait times for the court dates to ensure that nothing is done quickly or efficiently. She would also legislate to ensure that Alberta continues to have the lowest judges per capita in Canada.

The minister of seniors' bill would tell her that her stakeholders are not getting any younger. That way, by the time she has read her talking points on what she cannot do, she knows there will be one fewer stakeholder to help. Through her legislated ignorance she would not have to appoint a Seniors' Advocate to help them navigate the bureaucracy.

Now, I know these are a lot of bills to digest. Luckily, the job descriptions in these bills would be filled with items already practised by the ministers. Therefore, the bills would not change anything, and it should be relatively simple to work our way through these bills. Additionally, they would give the government a chance to talk about how great they are at their job descriptions, how they can do the things listed in the bill. They can talk about how they have had so much practice at the items in these bills since being elected.

I know that the minister responsible for Bill 1 likes to jump up and down and tell us how great he is at something that apparently he needs legislation to do, which is very confusing for me, that he would need legislation to do something he has been able to do for ages, but I digress.

Let me get to the point. This bill is useless. It is silly. It is a waste of our time. It's an affront to this House. I do not support useless bills; therefore, I do not support Bill 1.

Thank you.

10:00

The Chair: Any other speakers? Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak on Bill 1, the government's flagship bill, Promoting Job Creation and Diversification Act. Albertans and this Official Opposition have considerable concerns regarding this empty husk of a bill. It does nothing to explain how the NDP will actually create jobs, just like their failed jobs subsidy scheme, which they basically cancelled after it created zero jobs. This bill does nothing new. Section 2 of the act basically allows the minister to establish programs pertaining to job creation, increasing access to capital, supporting

innovation and export development. It is a mandate letter disguised as a bill, which is odd because the Premier no longer issues mandate letters, yet here we are with a job description for the minister with responsibilities he already had before.

Madam Chair, it's easy to measure a jobs bill's effectiveness. Does it create jobs and increase employment? That's a measure everyone can understand. This bill has been dying on the vine. Vague promises of, “You'll have to wait for the budget,” have come and gone, and it's still a really vague piece of legislation. One of my colleagues referred to this bill as vacuous. What a perfect word to describe a bill that is broad in promise but short on details. It's a form of hyperbole that our government seems to embrace. It's the fallback position of talking points.

The Minister of Economic Development and Trade loves to get up and proclaim how members on the opposite side of him believe a solution to this economic crisis will turn back the clock, that we propose reckless and extreme cuts that will only make things worse, that the bogeyman opposition will cut teachers and nurses and front-line workers, abandon seniors, and steal candy from babies. It's rhetoric, Madam Chair, a battered shield that this government can trot out when they are notoriously short on substance.

The reality is that the current government has failed to provide a single economic impact study or a single reason to justify why this bill is needed. I have not seen a single credible stakeholder or policy expert quoted on the record anywhere saying that this bill will accomplish something that can't already be accomplished. They claim that it will create jobs but are not demonstrating how. They're creating false hope. They're simply peddling the illusion of doing something for the job situation in our province.

The hon. member talks about setting a strong Alberta jobs plan that will support families and communities and diversify our energy industry. Now, that sounds great on paper, but so did the member's prior dismal failure of a jobs plan. That jobs plan was also rolled out without any credible assessment that it would actually create jobs, and for months the current government doubled down, saying that it would work. The previous Labour minister and the Finance minister were adamant that the failed jobs plan would be good for business.

Folks can't pay their bills and feed their families on ideology, Madam Chair. They need something more tangible than an eight-page document that contains fewer words than this speech does. We need a government that actually creates conditions that benefit Albertans, conditions that create growth and investment, something that this bill sorely lacks. Investment is fleeing the province. Spending is out of hand so much that we have experienced three credit downgrades while this government has been in power. Alberta needs stability and fiscal responsibility. We have seen neither beyond a misguided tax policy and a radical agenda based on debt and deficit.

Wildrose, on the other hand, released a 12-point jobs action plan that does propose solutions such as reducing small-business taxes, providing tax relief for families and stability for our energy sector. There is nothing in this current government's Bill 1 that even provides this much detail. If this bill had any semblance of focus, it would have included some of these points or made some valid ones of its own. It could have legislated change. Instead, we get vague talking points. This is cold comfort to the thousands of Albertans who are out of work.

They could do so much to empower Albertans, help them be part of the solution, help them use their entrepreneurship and creativity to diversify our economy, help reduce red tape, as we suggested. Let Albertans do what they have done since they settled and formed our province. Give them the tools, then get out of the way. Create the right economic conditions, break down barriers, and let

competition thrive. That's how a dynamic economy can be achieved.

Nobody in this House disputes how hard working Albertans are, but taxation and restrictions are not levelling the playing field. You need to ensure a fair regulatory environment, respect property rights, and provide stability for our energy sector. Lay a solid foundation for business, and the people will thrive. Stop hampering them with taxes on everything, restrictive and punitive ideologies, and simply help them help themselves. We have provided a framework within our jobs action plan that can be used to do just that, and we encourage this government to look beyond their ideologies and rhetoric and get Alberta back on track.

Alberta has long been referred to as the economic engine of Canada. This is absolutely nothing to be ashamed of, and in fact it should be shouted from the rooftops and celebrated. We need to enact policies that reflect this rather than stifling opportunity with massive taxes and restricting growth. This government is acting like a brake on this engine rather than the gas pedal.

You can't just create diversification and jobs on a piece of paper with less substance than a menu. You need sound economic principles and a regulatory environment that encourages innovation in all sectors. Lasting economic growth must have a sound foundation and be self-sustaining. It can't be created by a vague, feel-good mandate letter. The superficial wording of this legislation pretty much just positions the NDP government for talking points that could be used to portray opposition parties as opposing or blocking a program designed to create jobs. It's a vain exercise that attempts to shelter the government from critics pointing out that the bill really does nothing.

The last time we convened here to speak to this bill, in second reading, there was absolute silence on the government benches in speaking to the merits of the bill. To be fair to the government benches, I'd have a hard time defending this, too. Albertans are already worried and anxious about the future. There is nothing in this bill to reassure them. Rather, it just underscores the fact that the NDP don't have a real plan to promote job creation or diversify the economy despite the jobs title.

This bill is window dressing, an attempt to appear to the public that the government is doing something bold and creative. They are not. It's simply economic sleight of hand, and it wouldn't pass scrutiny at a carnival. Bill 1 doesn't do anything new or specific. Ministers can already create programs. This bill assigns no powers to the minister that he and other ministers don't already have, and it doesn't allow for much in the way of public accountability. Last month my colleague from Calgary-Foothills asked the minister some very pointed questions. He went line by line and asked the minister if he had the ability to create partnerships that support entrepreneurship and help businesses to grow and succeed. He went on to ask the minister if the minister had the power to help working people upgrade their skills and secure employment and increase the development and production of Alberta innovations. The answer to all these questions was, and I quote the minister: absolutely. End quote. That just proves how vacuous this legislation is, Madam Chair, a vacuous piece of legislation, indeed.

Now, according to section 4 of this act the minister must report on progress at least once a year to the Executive Council but then has no obligation to make those reports public. That's hardly the open and transparent government promised during the election, a flaw the NDP pointed out the former government continually lacked. Unfortunately for transparency, the Executive Council is under no real obligation to release these reports. Even the reporting is unqualified. It could simply be a verbal update to the Executive Council from a minister or a delegated official.

10:10

Mr. Rodney: You mean voice mode?

Mr. Loewen: Simple voice mode, as it were.

The reporting requirements are flimsy, at best; nonexistent would be more accurate.

Madam Chair, Bill 1, the minister's mandate letter, represents another miss by this government. It's delusion of action on jobs, another failure to propose some real solutions. It provides no relief to families, small business, or our hurting energy sector. It contains no indication of what the NDP will actually do for Albertans, and for that reason I will not be supporting this bill.

Now, when the minister brought this bill forward, he said: "That's why our government's number one priority is to help Alberta get through this downturn." This bill was introduced, I believe, on March 8, and today is May 18. My question is: if this is this government's number one priority and if this bill has any hope of doing anything, why are we sitting here on May 18, almost two and a half months later, waiting for this bill to be passed? Is it that important?

He went on to say: "Bill 1, Promoting Job Creation and Diversification Act, will give the government additional tools to carry out its Alberta jobs plan to do just that." Again, the question is: what additional tools? All the same tools the minister had in the first place. I guess it's understandable why the minister hasn't created one job. It's because he's still waiting to start work, and Albertans are waiting for him to start work, too.

Now, of course, he went on to say, in his rhetoric:

They propose reckless and extreme cuts that will make a bad situation worse, billions of dollars in cuts to front-line services; firing thousands of teachers and nurses; cutting supports for seniors; and abandoning the most vulnerable; no new schools, hospitals, or roads; and no plan to open new markets.

Well, the Premier has used some choice words in the past, that I won't reiterate here because of unparliamentary language. What I will say is that those comments from the minister are unsubstantiated, and they're not true. The facts are, Madam Chair, that the Wildrose have always stated that the reductions plans will not result in any loss of front-line staff. That is fact. That is in print, and the minister has absolutely no basis to make the claims that he made.

It was interesting in estimates to hear the Energy minister get up and say that she cut 2 per cent from her budget and did not lose one front-line staff. So my question is: how can a minister cut 2 per cent from her budget and not lose one front-line staff, but if the Wildrose was to suggest a 2 per cent cut, automatically it would be that thousands of teachers and doctors and nurses would be fired? I would find that amusing if it wasn't so absolutely wrong.

This is a quote again from the minister.

Alberta is known for its healthy small-business landscape and entrepreneurial spirit; 95 per cent of all businesses in the province are small businesses. Together they are responsible for 28 per cent of Alberta's GDP as well as 35 per cent of all private-sector employment in the province.

With this importance of small business, which, of course, we on this side of the House recognize, how can this government come up with this small-business tax reduction of 1 per cent in its budget when they flatly turned it down as one of our amendments last year? In fact, not only did they turn down the Wildrose suggestion of the exact same thing last year, but then we came and said: how about a .1 per cent reduction in small-business tax, just a token to small business in Alberta to show that government cares? And what did they do? They voted that down, too. Now, of course, they come up

and say: oh, the 1 per cent here is a great idea now. But when Wildrose proposed it last year: absolutely not, not even .1 per cent.

We've heard this government say that the opposition wants them to fail. That is simply not true. That's why we tell this government when they're off track. We come up with amendments. We come up with suggestions. We come up with plans. We make these well-intentioned amendments to their bills to help out, to help Albertans because we know that when this government fails, they fail Albertans, and that hurts Albertans. So to suggest that we want this is reprehensible.

Far too often, though, we have to tell this government: I told you so. Nobody wants to hear it, and we don't want to say it, but unfortunately we have to do that once in a while because this government fails to get things right the first time. They're constantly going on their ideological bent, that detracts from the opportunities that Albertans expect.

Again, Bill 1: I won't be supporting it. It's a vacuous bill. That's a great way to put it. It does nothing for Albertans; therefore, I can't support it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Panda: Madam Chair, I have some amendments, and I have the requisite copies.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Panda to move that Bill 1, Promoting Job Creation and Diversification Act, be amended in section 2 by renumbering it as section 2(1) and by adding the following after subsection (1):

(2) Prior to the establishment of any program under subsection (1), the Minister shall ensure that a member of the Executive Council introduces into the Legislative Assembly a motion that would require a committee of the Assembly to review the program and report back to the Assembly.

(3) The Minister shall not take any steps to implement a new program, including the signing of any agreements respecting that program, until the committee has submitted its report to the Assembly under subsection (2).

The Chair: Any members wishing to speak to the amendment?
The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. This government has a track record of creating programs that fail, cause protests, and are just completely useless. Therefore, we have created an amendment that will help this government create valuable programs for Albertans. This amendment will provide the government with a place to revise their programs before wasting valuable taxpayers' money on implementing programs that are doomed to fail. The committee will be struck to go over the programs in detail, and each member would have the opportunity to give their input and point out potential problems of the program.

Additionally, this committee could consult on these programs before – the key word is “before” – the program is implemented. We could contact experts on the program and get their input on how to make it better. There would be no more protests happening due to lack of consultation. After the committee has consulted and crafted the program into something valuable for Albertans, then the program could be implemented. This is just one extra step to ensure that Albertans get the best value for their taxes.

I encourage every member here to vote for this amendment to ensure that every program the minister would like to create with this bill is valuable for Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

10:20

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. When we're looking at creating amendments to any act, we need to be looking at how to make it better, and the fact is that when we're looking at this bill, really, we need to be asking the question: is there accountability? Now, we've got a job description here but no accountability.

This bill actually doesn't just affect itself; it actually affects multiple ministries. If we look at the bill itself, the establishment of programs, section 2(d), “Help working people upgrade their skills and secure employment,” that tells me that we need the minister to be working with the Minister of Labour, and we also need the minister to be working with the minister of postsecondaries. Now, what's important here is that in the end what we're seeing is the minister actually working with all ministries, in the end needing to make sure that not only these ministries are consulted but also the stakeholders of all of these ministries as well.

Now, how do we do that? Well, we can't do that with a lack of transparency. We can't do that with a lack of accountability. What we need to be looking at is, really: how exactly can we facilitate this? This is where this amendment comes in. “The Minister shall ensure that a member of the Executive Council introduces into the Legislative Assembly a motion that would require a committee of the Assembly to review the program and report back to the Assembly.” That means that we're actually involving MLAs in this as well. That means that we're involving everybody in this Chamber in the direction of where our province is going.

Now, we've already seen a failed program put out, the job creation program, and we've heard over and over again that it didn't create any jobs. That I would agree with.

The fact is that we're also bringing out new tax credits. Now, these tax credits are brought out by the ministry, and we have no foundation to work with. It's just: we're going to bring out \$250 million of corporate welfare, possibly, and we don't even know how or what entities are going to be involved in this. It's bringing out a plan with no plan. Now, that is why we need to make sure that the minister thinks this stuff out before he just goes and launches something that may in some cases put taxpayers' money at risk.

We are stewards of Alberta, and the fact that we're bringing out three different programs, I believe, through the economic development ministry, with a more complex set of rules and with no description of how they will be implemented, distresses me no end. The fact is that this program is not only going to affect our businesses today, because this program is a tax credit. Now, what's going to happen is that businesses can apply for this credit after their year-end has been done. So we're looking a full year, maybe a year and a half, two years down the road before we can even see any of the money, that \$250 million that's being put out, saving the Alberta economy. This is a ludicrous move.

We need jobs in my riding. Already we're seeing rates of almost 10 per cent unemployment in my riding, and the minister is putting this ministry forward to say: we're going to create jobs. Does the minister not have faith in the Minister of Labour? Does the minister not have faith in the postsecondary minister? We need to ask these questions because in the end what we need to be looking at is: what is this minister going to do? Why are we waiting for Bill 1 before he starts his job? Why are we not moving forward and actually

creating employment for Albertans, especially in the northern communities where we need it the most?

This is sad. This truly is sad, that we have a whole ministry that is moving forward in no direction. No direction. Creating Bill 1, three pages saying, “This is what I’m going to do,” is not the right direction. It’s amazing that a ministry has focused their whole attention on this waste-of-time bill when we need jobs in my riding. We need jobs across Alberta. We need to help Albertans through this economic downturn, and we’re not seeing it – we’re not seeing it – from this government. We need to move forward. It is legislation like this that is holding up the Legislature on things that are important, and we need to be moving this whole process forward to actually make an impact for Albertans.

Now, we have seen some legislation come through from the government that I agree with, and that legislation, being put through by some of the other ministers, is commendable. Why is Economic Development and Trade not taking the route that his fellow ministers are moving in? Not all of the legislation we’ve seen put forward is a waste of time. Actually, a lot of it is moving Alberta forward. We may not agree with all of the legislation that the government is bringing forth, but you will find that there are a lot of times where the opposition is trying to help the government move forward with its bills to try and make a better Alberta – a better Alberta – and this is not what this is doing.

This is creating a whole lot more – what? – amendments that are going to come later on, when the minister realizes that this didn’t cover, actually, what he needs to do? Does this mean that we’re actually going to create other legislation to add to this? Has this started a process of actually describing what all of the ministers are going to need to do? Are we going to be going through Bill 1 for every ministry? These ministers already can do these jobs. They know what they can do. Why the government hasn’t just gotten rid of this legislation is beyond me.

Now, let’s go to the point of talking about the fact that we have a ministry that is spending millions and millions of dollars and consulting afterwards. Now, I will say that we’re looking at creating an amendment that will actually change how the government is going to deal with the spending by this ministry. We need to have some accountability, and that’s through MLAs on the committee being able to facilitate decisions on where this government is going, and the only way we can do that is by voting for this amendment. This amendment actually will bring accountability. We need to bring accountability because we’ve seen what happened in the past when there was no accountability.

In closing, I encourage all of my colleagues to vote for this amendment because in the end we need to make sure that Albertans see that we are an accountable, transparent government.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I’ll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:30 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------|-------------|-----------|
| Aheer | Fildebrandt | Loewen |
| Barnes | Gill | MacIntyre |

| | | |
|--------|--------|-------|
| Cooper | Hanson | Panda |
| Cyr | Hunter | Pitt |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Anderson, S. | Fraser | Phillips |
| Babcock | Goehring | Piquette |
| Bilous | Hinkley | Renaud |
| Ceci | Hoffman | Rodney |
| Connolly | Horne | Rosendahl |
| Coolahan | Kazim | Schreiner |
| Cortes-Vargas | Kleinsteuber | Shepherd |
| Dach | Loyola | Sigurdson |
| Dang | Malkinson | Starke |
| Drever | McCuaig-Boyd | Sucha |
| Drysdale | McKitrick | Sweet |
| Eggen | Miller | Turner |
| Feehan | Miranda | Westhead |
| Fitzpatrick | Payne | Woollard |
| Totals: | For – 12 | Against – 42 |

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The title of this bill, Bill 1, is the Promoting Job Creation and Diversification Act. My clever colleague the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster calls it the *Seinfeld* bill because, of course, like the TV show, it’s a bill about . . .

Some Hon. Members: Nothing.

Mr. Rodney: . . . nothing. Thank you very much.

Similarly, with sincere apologies to William Shakespeare, I’ve come to think about it as *Much Ado About . . .*

Some Hon. Members: *Nothing.*

Mr. Rodney: This was not prerehearsed, Madam Chair. It just emanates from the Chamber.

In fact, in reading this bill, which does not take long at all, it is almost as humorous as the Bard’s classic farce. Let’s explore why. To begin with, when choosing to make Bill 1 the flagship legislation of this Second Session of the 29th Legislature, this government has told every Albertan that Bill 1 represents one of its key objectives. Job creation certainly sounds noble, doesn’t it? Well, it is noble, and it’s keenly, keenly necessary. Except this piece of legislation contains – wait for it . . .

Some Hon. Members: Nothing.

Mr. Rodney: . . . nothing, and the government’s job-creation plan so far has come to nothing. There’s that word again.

Budget 2015, unveiled last fall, introduced a job-creation tax credit that was going to create – do you remember the number? – 27,000 jobs. Wouldn’t that have been fantastic? Except the job-creation tax credit created how many jobs?

Some Hon. Members: One.

Mr. Rodney: Some would say one. Not one single Albertan was put to work because of this tax credit, which business could not use, except for the one ministerial appointment.

Within a few months the government abandoned its only job-creation plan. But Albertans are telling us loudly and clearly that

they want to see a government that supports job creation. What should a government without ideas do? Well, how about creating a flagship piece of legislation that has “job creation” in its title? It’s a great idea, except Bill 1 is empty.

Just as a point of information and clarification, a flagship is the vessel in a fleet that carries the admiral. This flagship does have an admiral in the form of a minister of the Crown, but the admiral is alone on the deck of a ship without any cargo. I could push this analogy a whole lot further – and it would be a whole lot more fun – but it would not be flattering, so I will restrain myself here today.

10:50

Madam Chair, the preamble to Bill 1 is a fascinating read. We apparently need new legislation to tell us that “all areas of Alberta, from rural communities and indigenous communities to the largest cities, will benefit from a stronger and more diversified economy.” Well, thank you very much, Bill 1, but I am really quite sure that Albertans clear across the province already knew that, I’m afraid, a little bit too well, especially these days.

What Bill 1 fails to mention is the rural economic development plan, which was created through thorough consultation with rural residents and communities in the last year of our previous government’s mandate. The whole premise of the plan was to build upon the successful economic diversification that was already going on. People weren’t just surviving; they were thriving. Perhaps the minister of economic development would do well to maybe glance at that report as it might help him to do his job as laid out in this mandate letter. Sorry. I meant legislation. Right.

Sticking with the preamble, we see a lot of talk about finding new markets for Alberta. Again nothing new here, sadly and inexcusably. Alberta has long been known for working hard to open markets and to keep them open and growing. A good example of that, Madam Chair, is the Ports-to-Plains trade corridor. I haven’t heard much about that lately. Not too long ago Alberta was a valued, significant part of this corridor, which went from Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. Part of the support for Ports-to-Plains included the Keystone XL pipeline. Remember that one, Minister? That’s the pipeline that your government decided to abandon.

If we turn to page 2 of the bill, we come to the substance of the legislation, except there is . . .

Some Hon. Members: None.

Mr. Rodney: . . . none. Right.

The bill simply tells us what the minister may do, which previous ministers have been doing for years and decades already. If the minister is dependent on this bill to give him ideas for economic development, well, what about that minister’s colleagues? Do they, too, need legislated mandate letters to tell them how they might handle their portfolios? If we’re all going to receive legislated mandate letters, the House won’t have any time at all to deal with the real business that Albertans expect of us, and, Madam Chair, that’s ridiculous. It’s just untenable.

If we turn to section 3(2), here’s where we learn that should the minister want to do something of substance, he must introduce a bill in the Assembly. I don’t think people need to be policy wonks to understand that this is just extremely time-consuming. Would it ever reveal any real results? There’s just no proof that it ever could or would.

This so-called enabling legislation does not enable the minister to do anything. In fact, some have told me that it actually disables the minister, and therein lies the farce of Bill 1. It clearly pays lip service to job creation and nothing more.

But we are not done exploring Bill 1. There is still an entire half page more. Half a page. In section 5 we learn that the minister may establish panels or committees to provide advice to him. Again, anyone in cabinet knows that that’s been happening ever since we’ve had a parliamentary system.

I do have one question for the minister. If he can establish panels and committees, can he not also appoint them? I’ve asked the Premier about representation on the Premier’s Advisory Committee on the Economy in the past, including all Albertans but especially our indigenous Albertans. Can the minister perhaps now make an appointment? There might be something positive that could come out of Bill 1.

Finally, I suppose a person could congratulate the government for its flagship bill for one important reason. As our hon. colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays likes to remind the minister, whenever the term “Bill 1” arises in this House, he says that it has been indeed successful in creating one job, and that would be the minister’s. At least that’s one more job created in Alberta, one more than the government’s last job-creation initiative.

With that, I thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Madam Chair, I have another amendment to present, and I have the requisite copies.

The Chair: This will be amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Panda: I move that Bill 1, Promoting Job Creation and Diversification Act, be amended by striking out section 4 and substituting the following:

Reports

4(1) The Minister must, at least annually, and more frequently if the Premier directs, prepare a report outlining:

- (a) the Minister’s progress in establishing and implementing any programs under section 2, and
- (b) the number of jobs created by all programs established under section 2.

(2) When prepared, a report under subsection (1) must

- (a) be laid before the Legislative Assembly by the Minister if the Assembly is then sitting or, if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting, and
- (b) be posted on a public website of the ministry of the Minister, regardless of whether it has first been laid before the Assembly under clause (a).

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Did you wish to continue speaking on the amendment?

Mr. Panda: Sure. I’d like to.

The Chair: Continue.

Mr. Panda: Madam Chair, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed mentioned the parliamentary system. I’m still learning. This is my first time proposing amendments to a bill in the hope that, you know, people are consistent in their voting patterns and all that in the House. But I’m a little bit confused because when the Member for West Yellowhead brought his motion, Motion 502, it asked the government to consult energy workers when they bring in new bills. We all supported it. With my previous amendment, all we are trying to do is make the bill better.

We all agree in the House, including the members opposite, that Bill 1 lacks details. Bill 1 is not required. The minister already has the powers he needs. If they really believe that Bill 1 has all that

usefulness and utility, probably the members from my neighbouring ridings, Calgary-Hawkwood or Calgary-Klein, would have stood up in the House and spoken in support of it. The fact that no member from the government bench has spoken in support of Bill 1 itself tells us that there is something wrong with the bill. That's what I thought, actually, when I proposed the first amendment, although in my initial speech I said that I won't support Bill 1 because there is nothing good in the bill. But then I changed my mind, and I brought in an amendment to make it better because that's what we are paid to do, to make it work. That's why we are here, to help the minister make it work so that he can actually create jobs. He can take credit for it.

Anyway, Madam Chair, this second amendment, section 4(1), that I propose, gives some much-needed meat to this bill. As the bill sits at the moment, the ministry is required to report to Executive Council once a year. It gives zero details of what that report should entail. For all we know, it could be the minister saying that his programs are going great. Not only that, but the House and the public will never find out the details of the report.

11:00

Thus, this amendment is twofold. The first part outlines what the report should entail. It should entail the progress in establishing and implementing any programs under section 2 of this bill. Since the title of this bill has "job creation" in it, this amendment also states that the minister must detail how many jobs have been created through the programs under section 2. With these two additions, the minister will be held to account in detail, in an open and transparent way.

The second part of this amendment is to publish this report to the House instead of the Executive Council. That way, this report, that details what the minister is actually doing, will be public knowledge. There is no reason to do things in secret, like other governments did before. Albertans do not want a government who prepares and delivers reports in secret. This is the government's flagship bill, and the results of this bill, if any, need to be made public. Combined, the two parts of this amendment will provide the minister with some accountability to the public. It changes nothing else about the bill other than the reporting aspect. If this is voted down, then the public should consider whether or not this government actually intends to follow through with their plans or if this is actually a useless bill, as we have been saying for weeks.

I hope the members opposite and the third-party members will support this amendment for the reasons I gave. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? Are you wishing to speak to the amendment, hon. minister?

Mr. Bilous: Yes, please. I'll be very brief, Madam Chair. I want to thank the member for bringing forward this amendment. Although I do respect and agree with the spirit of this amendment, I can assure this House that reporting on progress will be an ongoing matter not only with the Assembly, quite frankly, but with all Albertans as they're very interested. I mean, the economy is their number one priority; it's the number one priority of our government.

Working with the private sector, the job creators, government can only set the right conditions and support our business and industry throughout the province in all sectors. It is the private sector that creates jobs. I can assure this House that we will be continuing with ongoing dialogue with Albertans to know exactly what our government is doing and reporting progress on that on an ongoing basis.

Therefore, this amendment is not necessary, and I will not be supporting it. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Just briefly, Madam Chair. Obviously, this amendment is needed. This legislation is fairly empty, yet it seemed like the hon. minister needed a piece of legislation to outline specifically what his job was going to do. Now he's telling us that, no, it is government's job to report all the time. Well, frankly, if that's the case, why isn't this already in this legislation? There's no compulsion on the minister's part to respond to anybody but the Executive Council in this legislation. We need this amendment because, obviously, this minister needs that much micromanagement.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A2? I see none.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:05 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|-------------|--------|-----------|
| Aheer | Fraser | MacIntyre |
| Barnes | Gill | Panda |
| Cooper | Hanson | Pitt |
| Cyr | Hunter | Rodney |
| Drysdale | Loewen | Starke |
| Fildebrandt | | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|---------------|--------------|-----------|
| Anderson, S. | Fitzpatrick | Piquette |
| Babcock | Goehring | Renaud |
| Bilous | Hinkley | Rosendahl |
| Carson | Horne | Schreiner |
| Ceci | Kazim | Shepherd |
| Coolahan | Kleinsteuber | Sigurdson |
| Cortes-Vargas | Loyola | Sucha |
| Dach | Malkinson | Sweet |
| Dang | McCuaig-Boyd | Turner |
| Drever | McKitrick | Westhead |
| Eggen | Miller | Woollard |
| Feehan | Payne | |

Totals: For – 16 Against – 35

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill. Are there any further comments with respect to the bill? The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report progress on Bill 1 and that we rise and report Bill 12.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

11:10

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 12. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 1. I wish to table copies of all

amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 17
Appropriation Act, 2016

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 17, the Appropriation Act, 2016.

This act will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government for the 2016-17 fiscal year. The schedule to the act provides amounts that were presented in greater detail by the 2016-17 government and Legislative Assembly estimates tabled on April 14, 2016. These estimates were subsequently debated by standing committees and voted on in Committee of Supply.

This Appropriation Act will enable the implementation of the Alberta jobs plan, the government's response to the most challenging economic downturn in a generation. The plan has four key pillars: supporting families, investing in infrastructure, diversifying our energy industry and markets, and supporting Alberta businesses.

Madam Speaker, the Alberta jobs plan introduces more supports for businesses with a two-year, \$250 million package of initiatives, including the creation of two important new tax credits to promote early-stage capital investment. The new Alberta investor tax credit provides a credit for those investing in eligible small and medium-sized enterprises, and the capital investment tax credit provides credits for the first-time acquisition of new or used property or spending in value-added agriculture, tourism infrastructure, culture, manufacturing, and processing industries. The new tax credits are estimated at \$165 million over two years.

The Alberta jobs plan also reflects our belief that business leaders and financial experts know best how to support business. We are investing in the entrepreneurship incubator program to help small and medium-sized businesses bring their ideas to market; we are providing \$10 million in new funding to Innovate Calgary, TEC Edmonton, and regional commercialization organizations to support innovation and job creation; and we have committed \$10 million to expand the agrivalue processing incubator program. This will support further success in creating new companies in Alberta's food industry.

Other supports for business include an investment of \$5 million to help Alberta attract investments and new headquarters to our province and \$10 million for the regional economic development program, which supports community and business leaders to collaborate on business strategies to promote a wide range of industries across the province, from tourism to value-added processing.

In addition, our government announced in February the petrochemical diversification program. This will encourage companies to invest in development of new petrochemical facilities. The goal of this program is to attract investment, create jobs, and

provide long-term benefits to Albertans. We expect the new petrochemical facilities to generate about 3,000 construction jobs and more than a thousand permanent direct and indirect jobs. These job-creation initiatives reflect our government's central commitment to Albertans. It says: we have your back during these challenging economic times.

Madam Speaker, the Alberta jobs plan also makes a historic investment in our infrastructure, the lifeblood of the modern, 21st-century economy. We're investing in a five-year, \$34.8 billion capital plan that will build and upgrade roads, transit, schools, and hospitals right across the province. Our funding commitments over the next five years include \$9 billion in municipal infrastructure support over five years, as I said, including \$6.1 billion under the municipal sustainability initiative; \$6.2 billion for capital maintenance and renewal; \$4.6 billion for roads and bridges, including Calgary and Edmonton's ring roads; \$3.5 billion for health facilities and equipment, including \$1.2 billion for the new Calgary cancer centre and \$365 million to improve access to long-term care facility housing right across the province; \$3.5 billion for schools, including \$2.9 billion to complete the 200 new and modernization projects previously announced, with \$500 million for future projects; and \$900 million for affordable housing.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, all members of this Chamber know well that our province has enjoyed prosperity when oil prices have been high, but we've also felt the pain when oil prices have plummeted. Every Albertan is feeling the pain right now. We all see it every day. That is why our government has vowed to get off the royalties rollercoaster. Therefore, a key pillar of the Alberta jobs plan is to diversify our energy industry and open up new markets.

In addition to the measures I've already discussed, Budget 2016 takes a historic step to implement the climate leadership plan. This plan is an important step to achieve our energy goals. It will phase out our coal emissions and develop more renewable energies. It will implement a new carbon price on greenhouse gas emissions, and it will legislate an oil sands emissions limit and employ a new methane emissions reduction plan for the oil and gas sector. Mr. Speaker, to be clear now, the carbon levy is a key component of the climate strategy, and every single penny of the levy raised will be rebated back to Albertans or recycled back into the economy. That's the levy. The climate leadership plan demonstrates that Albertans are committed to being one of the most environmentally responsible, progressive energy producers in the world, and this plan will also help us open up new markets for our energy products and will ensure that Albertans get full value from the energy we sell.

Mr. Speaker, our government is also determined to help families get back on their feet during these tough economic times. Supporting Alberta's families is a key pillar of our jobs plan, that takes steps to ensure families who are affected by the downturn are supported. This summer we are implementing the Alberta child benefit and enhancing the Alberta family employment tax credit. Together these will support about 380,000 children, and those benefits will start to flow in July.

We're fully funding enrolment growth in our public schools and increasing operating grants in all of our universities, colleges, and postsecondary institutions. The Alberta jobs plan also invests \$15 million in new funding to help apprentices complete their training and work experience requirements and \$10 million for the training for work program. This program will help unemployed or marginally employed Albertans, including women, indigenous people, and newcomers, secure and maintain employment in high-demand jobs.

Mr. Speaker, as I conclude, let me be clear that Budget 2016 also contains important initiatives to control spending. For example, some of the cost-saving initiatives include amalgamating or dissolving 26 agencies, boards, and commissions; freezing management salaries at government agencies, boards, and commissions; freezing salaries for cabinet, MLAs, and political staff for the entire term of this Legislature; freezing senior public servant salaries for two years; and reducing budgets for salaries and supplies in government departments by nearly 2 per cent this year. As this fiscal year continues, perhaps as early as this afternoon I'll have more to say on measures that our government will be taking to find cost efficiencies across government.

11:20

In closing, Mr. Speaker, let me be clear that Budget 2016 maintains the key advantages that make Alberta a great place to live, work, and to start a business. We continue to have the lowest overall tax regime in Canada, no provincial sales tax, no payroll tax, and no health care premiums. And as members of this Chamber know well, we are supporting Alberta's small businesses with a one-third cut to the small-business tax rate, from 3 per cent to 2 per cent.

In summary, the Appropriation Act before you enables us to implement the Alberta jobs plan and support Albertans during these tough times. This act will create the conditions for 100,000 new jobs and will support Albertans when they need our help most. I ask all members of this Chamber to support this bill, support jobs, and support Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other members who would like to speak to Bill 17?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to rise today and speak to Bill 17, the Appropriation Act, 2016, the next stage of our budget debate here. I certainly welcome the Minister of Finance to be here for the full debate and to engage back and forth so that he can answer questions from the Official Opposition.

This budget is the latest reckless budget in a very long series of reckless budgets in this province. This is the ninth consecutive consolidated deficit in this province. On a consolidated basis we have run deficits every single year since 2008. We have seen our net financial assets in this province decline by almost \$65 billion. We used to have zero debt and \$17 billion in the rainy-day sustainability fund. We had zero debt and 17 billion bucks in the bank. Today we have about zero bucks left in the rainy-day fund and have a debt that will soon exceed \$58 billion, before the next election.

This is grossly irresponsible. This is intergenerational theft, Mr. Speaker. This is taking from future generations to pay for today. To take money that doesn't belong to you is not right. To take from future generations, to tax future generations before they have had any chance to even vote for the politicians making the decisions that we're making today, is intergenerational theft. Today's deficits are tomorrow's taxes.

We've got a bunch of chirping MLAs over there who have no interest in making responsible decisions. They have an interest in only spending as much as they can to try and buy off the electorate to try and get re-elected. But some of us in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, take a longer term view of things. I believe that we should hold our finances as a trust, the way we should view the environment. Just as we inherit an environment today, we are expected to pass on an environment to our children and our grandchildren that is, at the very least, no worse – no worse – than

the environment we inherited. We should always try to pass on an environment that is better to future generations and certainly not any worse.

We should take the same view of our finances, Mr. Speaker. We should take an intergenerational, big-picture view of things, not just short-term decisions to try and get us re-elected in three years. That's irresponsible. We should be responsible with our finances across the generations. Instead, we are seeing a \$60 billion decline in our net financial assets over the last decade. We are seeing a debt that will exceed \$50 billion in just a few short years, and it's not enough.

Just four and a half months ago the Minister of Finance had the gall to sit right across from me in this Chamber and introduce a bill that he said would provide a reasonable cap on our debt, at 15 per cent of debt to GDP. That was a significant increase to the debt ceiling in this province, and he repeated until he was blue in the face, Mr. Speaker, that 15 per cent was the absolute highest we would ever, ever go. Famous last words from the last session.

Just four and a half months later the Minister of Finance, accompanying this budget, has to bring forward another bill to repeal his own debt ceiling. I would be embarrassed if I was the Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker. I hope that he will be able to stand up in this Chamber and defend his decisions on repealing his own debt ceiling just a few short months after he touted it as a measure of fiscal responsibility. We said it then, that it was not going to hold water, that we would be like the U.S. Congress, where every nine months we come back to the Legislature and state that we need to increase the debt ceiling just a little bit more and then nine months later do it again, and again, and again.

I said this years ago, when the former government repealed Ralph Klein's strict laws against debt and borrowing in this province. We were boiling the frog very slowly in this province, going from a debt-free status with money in the bank to spending the sustainability fund to going back into debt only for capital to going into debt for capital and operations but limited to 15 per cent and now no limit whatsoever. This is grossly irresponsible, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Alberta has a very serious spending problem. We spent more than two and a half thousand dollars more per capita on program spending in this province than British Columbia. Now, British Columbia is not some right-wing, conservative dystopia without roads, police, firefighters, nurses, and teachers. British Columbia is governed by Liberals, probably the least offensive brand of Liberalism in the country, but it is governed by a Liberal government that is providing a high quality of public services, yet they manage to spend two and a half thousand dollars less per capita.

Compared to Ontario, a socialist basket case, we are spending three and a half thousand dollars more per capita. An absolute basket case of a province, facing insolvency, with the largest subnational sovereign debt in the world is spending three and a half thousand dollars less per capita than Alberta on programs, and these members over here have the guts to say that cutting a single dollar of spending out of this government will result in mass layoffs of nurses, doctors, and teachers. If that's not untruthful, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what is.

Now, what's their plan moving forward? What's the plan moving forward? They have no plan. They have said that they're going to control costs, but there's no evidence of it in their budget. They continue to increase spending in every single year of their plan. There is little assurance in the way of details in their budget that would give us any confidence that they will even be able to hold to it.

They have gone out and hired big union bosses from the AUPE to go from one side of the table to sit on the other side of the table, so we're going to have AUPE-friendly governments negotiating with AUPE negotiators with AUPE, who happened to staff their elections. That's a conflict of interest, Mr. Speaker. Taxpayers are not going to be represented at that table. All you're going to see is big government unions negotiating with big government unions for the benefit of a government-first government.

Now, this government has taken very little in the way of any spending restraint, but they've shown no restraint whatsoever when it comes to taxes. Now, they like to pat themselves on the back for the small-business tax cut proposed by the Official Opposition. When the Official Opposition proposed the exact same tax cut – the exact same tax cut – in the spring session of 2015, they did not have the guts to vote for it then.

11:30

I know that when the four veteran members of that caucus sat in the back corner as the fourth party just over a year ago, they would say constantly to the former government: why would you not accept our amendments just because they're from the opposition? Good ideas come from all parties. No party has a monopoly on good ideas, as much as we all tend to think that our own parties do. No party has a monopoly on good ideas. But when the Official Opposition put forward an amendment to their own bill to reduce the small business tax rate from 3 per cent to 2 per cent, they said that it would be reckless and that they couldn't possibly vote for it. They voted against it even though every single party in the Legislature other than the government supported it. Then just a year later they turn around and say: it's our idea, and no one else had anything to do with it.

Absolute power corrupts absolutely, Mr. Speaker. The democratic principles that the four veteran members on the government side used to hold when they were in opposition seem to have really gone by the wayside. I know that the minister of economic development would not agree with himself if he was debating himself from opposition. He would stand up in this Legislature and say that no party has a monopoly on good ideas and that if the government hears a good idea, they should accept it. That is the one bright spot, though, in this budget, that the government has accepted the Official Opposition's idea to cut the small business tax rate. Now, that's the only good piece.

In the small spring session of 2015 the government brought in a rash of new taxes. They kept in place several of the proposed taxes from the outgoing government in the budget that was not passed. In addition, they raised business taxes in this province by 20 per cent, and they finally abolished the once-proud flat-tax system in this province, the flat-tax system in this province that made us the shining example in this country of fiscal rectitude, of fiscal conservatism. That was the very foundation of the Alberta advantage, Mr. Speaker.

I am proud to stand for real fiscally conservative policies like the idea that if you are willing to work hard, if you are willing to take risks and start a small business, if you're willing to bust your back, the government should not penalize you for earning more. That is real equality, Mr. Speaker. That is the Alberta advantage that this party stands for and that I wish this government would stand for. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, keep it down.

Mr. Fildebrandt: If 10 per cent is good enough for God, it should be good enough for the government. Some of us believe in God; some of us believe in government. Mr. Speaker, I can tell that you agree.

In the fall budget they went further, implementing new taxes on things like gasoline and diesel, and now with this . . .

An Hon. Member: Hallelujah.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm getting more amens from the speakers over there. I would remind them that we're no longer on Bill 1, as enjoyable as that debate was.

This budget is now bringing forward a massive new carbon tax, a \$3 billion carbon tax that is going to penalize businesses, families, and individuals in this province. It is going to hammer our number one key industry at a time when it's already on its knees. When the price of oil has plummeted, when we are experiencing an already natural economic slowdown, this government is going to kick the knees from under our oil and gas industry.

I represent Strathmore-Brooks, towns with very serious junior oil and gas servicing and drilling industries and many other ancillary industries, and they are getting hammered. The government may have consulted with big oil, to their credit, but they didn't talk to small oil. They didn't talk to medium oil. They didn't talk to the small drilling and service companies in places like Brooks that are getting hammered, that are closing their doors. Some of them are barely keeping their doors open to keep alive, but they're laying off employees, just waiting for this to pass while others are shutting down outright. They're going to kneecap them, and they're going to hammer families with a backdoor PST, the equivalent of a 3 to 4 per cent PST on Alberta families, when they promised that they would never do it. That's shameful, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I know that the Minister of Finance and members on the government side love to call it a levy. Well, Mr. Speaker, if it quacks like a tax, if it sounds like a tax, if it hurts your wallet like a tax, what is it?

Some Hon. Members: A tax.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, I know that even the government would agree with me.

Now, I would encourage all members of the House who have the fiscal plan handy to open to page 22. There is a table here that I find very interesting. It lists the government's different taxes: personal income tax, corporate tax, education property tax, other taxes, and then it says something called "carbon levy." Then if you read the title of this table on page 22 – I would invite members to do that; I would invite the Minister of Finance to stand up and read the title of it – it reads, "Tax Revenue". You can call it whatever you want, Mr. Speaker. You could call it an environmental levy. You could call it anything you want, but at the end of the day it's a tax, and it's going to hit Albertans hard like a tax.

Now, they're saying that they're going to do this for social licence. Well, what are their lefty friends in Ontario doing right now? They are proposing a ban on natural gas. It's *Flintstones* policy, Mr. Speaker. They are proposing to ban natural gas. It is absolute insanity. Ideologically the closest aligned government to the NDP in Canada is probably the Ontario Liberals – the Ontario Liberals – and they're proposing to ban natural gas in Ontario. It is absolute insanity. So what kind of social licence success is this? What kind of social licence is this? It's not succeeding.

Now, we want this government to succeed. I want pipelines built. I want market access. I know that members of the Official Opposition and, I would dare say, even the other opposition parties all want what is best for Alberta here, and that is to get pipeline access and market access to international markets here, but buying people off with this promise of a carbon tax, which will do nothing to lower global emissions, is a fraud. This is promising people that

it's going to get pipelines built and market access before any are built.

So let's just try this on for size. If the government is saying that it's going to bring in a carbon tax, shouldn't we at least make it conditional first on there being pipelines built to the east, west, and south before we start hammering Albertan families?

So I'll summarize where we are at, Mr. Speaker. This government's plan to move forward is to pray. They are praying for a rise in oil prices. They are praying that the traditional roller coaster of oil and gas prices, that they promised to get off of, is going to go back up. Oil would need to be over a hundred dollars a barrel for this government to balance the budget. Over a hundred dollars a barrel. They blame the entire deficit on the price of oil, but no matter what the price of oil will be, pretty much, we're going to still be running a deficit. So this government's plan is to pray for high oil prices. It is to pray that their corporate welfare spending program is going to somehow pay off, that in three years they're going to be able to wave their magic wand, and through government state intervention into the economy they'll be able to forcibly diversify it to replace our entire oil and gas sector. They're living on a prayer.

Most importantly, they are praying that Albertans won't pay attention. They are praying that Albertans won't know how to read the balance sheets that see a meltdown of \$60 billion in our net financial assets. They are praying that Albertans won't read this budget and see \$50 billion of debt before the next election. They are praying that Albertans won't read this budget and see an ND PST carbon tax that is going to punish families and businesses in this province without any hope for market access or social licence in advance. They are praying that Albertans are not paying attention. But the Official Opposition is paying attention to it, and we are going to make them pay for it every step of the way.

11:40

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I'm just asking for the unanimous consent of the Chamber, if they might, to revert to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three grade 6 classes, which are behind me in the gallery right now. They are coming from the constituency of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, particularly from Rimbey elementary school: kids from Rimbey, of course, as well as the county of Ponoka, and communities such as Bluffton. A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of joining all three of these grade 6 classes for one social class at their school, and I can tell you that they've learned their curriculum this year very, very well, and they had very, very good questions and even answers, something that we don't see too often in this Chamber. With that said, I would ask that they would all rise with their chaperones and with their teachers and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. member, I had the privilege of meeting them before I came into the Assembly, and they said that you are a very nice MLA.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 17 Appropriation Act, 2016 (continued)

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

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I'm pleased today to rise and talk on the bill at second reading. To start, I guess I want to focus on the consequences of this government's budget, this government's legislation, the huge increase in spending, the continuation of the high per capita spending. It's very, very fitting that we've just introduced three grade 6 classes, who, unfortunately, are going to be paying back these billions and billions of dollars of debt, never mind the \$2 billion in annual interest in a short time. The consequences, of course, of the interest: we've seen in other provinces how interest has become the second- or the third-biggest line item, crowding out money that's needed for the very schools that hon. members are heckling me about; \$2 billion a year in interest just three short years from now. I dare say that that's 80 brand new schools a year, never mind how many teachers, how many nurses, how many doctors, how many mental health workers, how many things we could do with that money instead, rather than paying banks, rather than paying affluent people more interest.

So what it's going to take away from the quality of Albertans' lives needs to be addressed. What we also need to know – it's also fitting that we started this morning talking about Bill 1, the government's on-paper-only attempt to diversify the income and add jobs. Surely, by now our friends across the floor must realize from all the businesspeople, from all the editorials we've seen written how all these new taxes, how these new regulations, how this uncertainty is either scaring business away or causing it to halt.

I read a few minutes ago that the new buyer of Sanjel in Calgary has closed the office. Let's add that to the hundred thousand jobs that have been lost since May 5 of last year. Let's add that to the, I think, somewhere around \$50 billion that's not being invested in our province, money that adds jobs, money that we can tax and create services with, you know, a province that was home to the Alberta advantage, home to Albertans taking care of Albertans, families taking care of friends and each other and the landscape that we're at now. That's the second part of the consequences that greatly concern me.

Then there's the consequences of your budget and the extra spending and the extra taxing. I mean, the carbon tax clearly – clearly – is going to be a huge tax on Alberta families and communities. We've thrown numbers back and forth here on this side. We think it's at least a thousand dollars per Alberta family. Never mind that you guys from the Alberta government side are doubling gas tax. My goodness; Alberta families and consumers finally get a break on the price of gas, and you jump in to take it away from them. You know, it's amazing.

To me, one of the revealing things in the House three or four weeks ago was that I think the minister of environment said that lower income Albertans would be given a rebate equal to the GST rebate. I hope I heard that wrong because if that's right, that suggests to me that your government – your government – thinks it's a 5 per cent tax. As the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks said: a tax is a tax. It comes out of Albertans' pockets. It comes out of Alberta families' budgets. It comes out of our communities.

There's a huge rumour going around Medicine Hat now about some businesses about to close. Mr. Speaker, as you well know, we've lost lots. It would be unfortunate to lose more.

Yeah, the economy has changed, but the amount of money that Albertans have has changed dramatically. I spoke in this House about a month ago about a friend of mine who, fortunately, is still working the same job that he had a year and a half ago, taking the same money out of his corporation that he did a year and a half ago. Mr. Speaker, the net to himself is \$800 a month less – \$800 a month less – that he's not spending in men's clothing stores, that he's not spending in restaurants. He had a small business on the side, but without this \$800, he decided it wasn't worth his effort, worth the risk to continue, so a couple of layoffs for a couple of employees. This friend takes care of his parents. Thank goodness he hasn't quit that yet.

You know, I also want to go on and talk a little bit about how we got here. The last speaker spoke about our high per capita spending. The last government, the Progressive Conservatives, had spending levels 20 per cent more on a per capita basis than the Canadian average, and what it led to was inflation and waste. Unfortunately, under this new government, when you had the opportunity to make changes, we have seen our scores in health care continue to slip. Alberta is not a leader in spite of spending the most money.

That brings me to my next point. This government has some rhetoric around bringing costs in line. As Health shadow minister I can't help but smile when the Minister of Health stands up and says that she's going to bend the cost curve. Instead of increasing it 6 per cent, as the last government used to, she's only going to increase it 3 per cent. Then I look at \$240 million over budget last year. Mr. Speaker, at \$20 million or \$25 million a school how many schools could that \$240 million have built? How many nurses, doctors, teachers, mental health workers would that have been?

11:50

Mr. Speaker, I guess my point here: it's a lot easier to say than it is to do. Like Bill 1, we have seen so little, almost no action when it comes to getting more value for the Alberta taxpayer out of this government. Yeah, we have rhetoric and talk. We run around and make these promises, but at the end of the day we have a government that's borrowing to buy the groceries, a government that's borrowing to keep the lights on, a government where three years from now every family in Alberta will be spending \$2,000 per year just to pay the interest at the same time, with our high per capita spending, at the same time as our programs, especially in health care, are slipping. What have we seen this government do?

Mr. Nixon: Not much.

Mr. Barnes: Not much but hurt equity and fairness.

Alberta's unemployment rate will be 8 per cent in 2016, 7.5 per cent in 2017, above the national average by almost a full point. Mr. Speaker, when have we seen that? I absolutely know that a large part of that increase in unemployment is because of this government's ideology, this government's spending. The uncertainty they have caused has driven \$50 billion of private investment out of the province.

I find it so disingenuous when this government stands up and says that we can afford to go into debt because we have the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio, and then inside of four months what was a debt ceiling is completely disregarded. Well, Mr. Speaker, we all know that Albertans will decide three years from now what the appropriate level of debt is. Can we afford to go into debt?

Yeah, you know, it's going to lower our credit rating. Albertans know that when your credit rating is lower, you pay a higher interest rate. Albertans know that when you have a lower credit rating, it's harder to borrow. There are more acquisition costs in bureaucracy to do the borrowing that has to be done. Albertans know that when

their government is borrowing billions and billions of dollars, it makes it harder for private industry to compete, to borrow the same money, to actually create efficiency and jobs and investment and a long-term, innovative strategy that is based on finding new technologies, finding innovation, and finding ways to truly diversify the economy.

You know, the Finance minister stood up and said: the four pillars of the budget. I absolutely believe that he and the government have failed on all four, taking thousands of dollars out of families' pockets, taking thousands of dollars out of communities, so businesses will have more trouble attracting scarcer dollars, so families will have more trouble paying for their decisions, services they may want, holidays they may want, whatever they may want.

Infrastructure was the second pillar. We've seen very little on that other than an attempt to create a list, but, again, huge billions of dollars of unallocated amounts. Under the previous government the Wildrose opposition clearly showed how on a per capita basis we were spending double – double – what other provinces were spending and not receiving the extra value for the infrastructure. I don't know why the new government has stayed quiet on trying to get the taxpayer more value out of infrastructure.

The third pillar was diversification. Pick up any newspaper. Look on any blog. The uncertainty of the continuation of your high per capita spending, the uncertainty of your new taxes: the uncertainty that you cause has done more to hurt diversification by a long shot than it has to help.

The last pillar was to help small businesses. Well, you increased the tax, and then you put the tax back to where it was. I understand that you're some side of \$700 million less in tax revenues than a year ago. Businesses are paying less tax there but, obviously, making way less money. Way to go there, too, guys. Good job.

You have failed on every single pillar, and you're spending \$50 billion, the highest spending in Alberta's history. You've continued the last government's inefficient per capita spending. You have put Alberta families, Alberta job providers, job creators further in debt, further behind the eight ball.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I will state that I will be happy to vote against this bill at every step. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Is it with respect to 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cooper: I'm okay.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions for the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat under 29(2)(a)?

The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 17, the Appropriation Act, 2016. I wish I was rising to speak to a significantly different budget, one that didn't put the future of our province at risk, one that took a much longer term vision of the province, because there's one thing that I'm certain of, and it's that this NDP budget is making things worse. It's punishing families and businesses with risky, ideological policies. There are a number of different points in this budget that cause significant concern, particularly for families and the costs that are associated with raising a family in the Alberta of tomorrow because of this NDP government.

When we look at just the carbon tax alone, the carbon tax will punish everyday families and businesses and make life significantly more expensive. Everything from heating your house to the groceries you buy, Mr. Speaker, to driving your grandkids around to hockey practice will be more expensive thanks to this budget and to the NDP's carbon tax.

While the government would have you believe that every low-income Albertan will be fully compensated in the form of a rebate because of the program that they've initiated, nothing could be further from the truth. When you start to add up all of the costs that are associated with this tax, it is going to be significantly – significantly – higher than the \$400 that their rebate provides at the full rebate. What that does is that it causes a significant amount of stress on families. It makes everything more expensive. We're going to see a significant increase in the cost of fuel, a significant increase in the cost of heating your home in the form of natural gas, and the big challenge here, Mr. Speaker, is how this tax will make everything more expensive.

12:00

I was speaking to the owner of a transportation company in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills just a number of weeks ago, and he fully intends to add into the cost of trucking a line item that says "carbon tax" because the costs are going to be passed along.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt; however, under Standing Order 4(2.1) the Assembly stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:01 p.m.]

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