



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 28, 2016

Day 53

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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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)	Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
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Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)	Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
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Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
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Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND), Deputy Government Whip
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 28, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us bow our heads and reflect or pray, each in our own way. Today let us allow ourselves to speak passionately and freely about the issues before us. Let us also practise patience with one another.

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

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I proudly stand today to introduce a class from Westbrook elementary school, who are here in the gallery, from the Edmonton-Rutherford constituency. This school is well known for their creativity, their work with diverse students, and their extensive French program. Today we have with us 36 members of the school, including their teacher Shawn Nordstrom and the parent chaperones Momina Muhammad and Taqi Syed. If I could ask them to all please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, both the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park and I are pleased to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly a group of Sherwood Park home-schoolers. The students are accompanied by their teacher. Les étudiants et étudiantes sont accompagnés par leur enseignante Mme France Gagnon and with chaperones Ms Judy Wolowich Negrey, Mr. Todd Faulkner, Mrs. Jennifer Kennedy, Mrs. Dawnelle Block, Ms Sharla Quantz, Ms Jane Fernandez, Ms Shelley Brewer. One of the parents, Mrs. Jennifer Kennedy, is a published writer. There's a very special young man with them. One student's grandfather is Roger Brewer, who is the current sessional recordist, and the other grandfather was the former Sergeant-at-Arms William Semple. The student's name is Dominic Semple. I would like to ask the parents, the teacher, and everyone to stand up and receive the customary welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups, hon. members?
Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly

five representatives from three organizations dedicated to improving the physical and mental health of youth in Alberta. Mr. Bill Wells is the chief executive officer of the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association, and with him is their president, Mike Roma. John Jagersma is the executive director of the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta. Brian Torrance is the executive director of Ever Active Schools, and with him today is student Tiffany Gingras. All these organizations recently provided me with valuable input and feedback on my private member's bill, the Active Schools Week Act, which I'll be introducing later today. I'd ask that all my guests rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two constituents of mine, George Winter and Pam Carlton. George is a retired professor of economics and the dean of business at Athabasca University and still runs a grain farm in Athabasca. George spent two years in Indonesia as director of the Sulawesi regional development study, which was a joint University of British Columbia and Canadian International Development Agency project. Then he spent an additional two years as dean of agriculture at the CIDA project. Pam was an Australian volunteer abroad and spent two years in Tonga, where she was a librarian at a large girls' school at Queen Salote College. She then spent two years at the University of Swaziland as a librarian and at the faculty of agriculture. This accomplished couple are both seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I ask them to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you members of the information management branch in my ministry of Service Alberta. I ask that our guests rise as I read out their names. The work of this branch is certainly paving the way forward for how our government manages one of our most strategic resources, information. I'm so pleased to introduce them. We have Maurine Johnson, Madeline Driscoll, Hany Alanwer, Sunea Corry, Kelly Foisy, Matthew Brown, Ryan Dyck, David Kruch, Andrew Chu, Boryana Vasileva, Johanna Loyola, Kathleen Levesque, Sherry Lovelace, Garth Clarke, and Jeff Kocuipchyk.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my incredible constituency staff for Edmonton-Decore. Maria Vicente and Denis Sidlin have been with me since the beginning and continue to be invaluable not only to me but to all my constituents of Edmonton-Decore as well. I would ask that they now please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today – and I'm very proud to do so – to introduce Lindsay Law and her

lovely children Eliza, Adaline, and Isaac. Now, Lindsay is a happy home-schooling mom of no fewer than five children. Her family has just finished a cross-Canada tour, visiting many of the legislative buildings across the country. Of course, they're very happy to be here in our Legislature building in Alberta. Eliza is 12 years old. She loves to play the piano and cook and sew and read and help with her baby brother. She's organized a number of activities to raise money and goods for organizations such as the Calgary Food Bank and coats for kids. Next is Adaline. She's 10 years old, and she positively enchants with her cello and loves gymnastics and yoga and helping organize the house. She's currently working at starting a snow removal business. Finally, last but not least, Isaac, 7 years old, loves to build cities with Lego and play outside and read. His favourite place to visit on that recent trip was the CN Tower. I ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

1:40

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you two great friends of mine, dedicated pillars of our community in southeastern Alberta. They know the importance of family, community, and staying involved in politics in our communities, all the time raising a family and running a successful farm. In addition to that, Joan is the niece of former Premier Harry Strom, and Jim has greatly helped me through two campaigns, knocking on hundreds of doors, attending 30 or plus town halls with me, all the time only falling asleep once, and talking to many Albertans about property rights and the problems of excessive taxation and government. If I could ask Jim and Joan Babe to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome. Welcome, neighbour. There are several people who do fall asleep when the hon. member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is speaking. They occasionally fall asleep.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great honour to stand up in the House today and introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly an individual that is actually at the core of my life, an individual who's so incredibly supportive, an individual whom I could not live without. She's incredibly dedicated to our children as well, a wonderful mother, an incredible volunteer on the campaign when I needed her, and that's my beautiful wife, Johanna Loyola. I'd ask her to please stand and for her to get the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for the St. Albert constituency.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you a group from the Skills Society, a local nonprofit organization that has provided supports to people with disabilities since the early '80s. In advance of International Day of Persons with Disabilities they're here to celebrate. I'd ask them each to rise as I say their name if they are able to: Lisa Robinson, Sanja Zenkijevic, Cathy Monk, Dawn Kamara, Chris Bruce, Geneva Auger, Emily Hannem, Michelle Pasemko, Sue Brewer, Sarahlynn Sparks, Jennifer King, Erin Mueller, Erin Kinloch-Galesloot, Barbara Wegoye, Danielle Hayes, Lasha Robert, and, last but not least, my

friend Bev Hills. Please join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Active Transportation

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, as most in this Chamber know, I'm a bike commuter, and I try to use it as my main means of transportation year-round. It's not always possible, though, particularly when I have to travel longer distances in a short time, so there are days when I have to drive even just a short distance from my home to this House.

But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, on the days that I ride, I feel better and I arrive in a far happier, healthier state of mind. The small bit of exercise I get riding from home to here helps clear my head, connect me to the world around me, and reset my perspective. This was also true when I was young and, like most kids, used to walk or bike to school; however, as of 2009 only 13 per cent of children were still doing the same. Studies show that when children get a small amount of exercise before school, they arrive more focused and ready to learn. With rising rates of obesity and chronic disease, it's more important than ever that we start learning healthy habits while we're young.

That's why I'll be introducing Bill 209, the Active Schools Week Act, which mandates that the first full week of October be designated active schools week and that in that week all Alberta schools hold participatory activities encouraging students to bike, walk, or wheel to school, activities like Belgravia school's walking school bus supported by Ever Active Schools or the Blood Tribe in Treaty 7, who bus their students within a kilometre or two of school and then let them walk the rest of the way. These are small steps that make a big difference in building community and healthy habits that can last a lifetime.

Mr. Speaker, active transportation is the best way to start and end a school or work day. I look forward to introducing Bill 209 later this afternoon.

Government Policies

Mr. Barnes: Medicine Hat and southeastern Alberta know all about ups and downs. From the introduction of the railway to bumper crops to drought and depression the area was forged in times of challenge and bold determination. We know the hardship of times like the 1980s, but we also know the abundance of the boom years.

The circumstances may change, but do you know what has stayed constant? Through it all the people have always believed that hard work and the bonds of local community could create great things. The weather might not co-operate sometimes, the land doesn't always produce as it should, energy prices fluctuate, but ultimately Alberta is great because of Albertans, the people who go to work to provide, the people who donate generously to help others, the people who care for family and loved ones.

There's something wrong with the picture today. In Cypress-Medicine Hat we have innovative, productive businesses like greenhouses and fabricators already being crippled by new taxes and regulations. We have investors looking at other jurisdictions because they fear what the NDP government is doing to the economy here. We are told that we need to aggressively raise the price of carbon to get less of it.

Well, come to Medicine Hat and ask a local not-for-profit what raising the price of labour does. All of these damaging actions have one theme tying them together: the government does not believe in Albertans enough to let them grow and thrive, free from burden. The NDP believes a myth that they can create growth by adding constraints, that they can encourage productivity by punishing earnings, and that a stick is a better incentive than a carrot.

If the strength of Alberta is the people, then the goal must be to foster freedom and self-determination. The Alberta advantage was about much more than money. It was a fundamental principle that free enterprise, opportunity, and the strength of our people could guide us far better than any government. Mr. Speaker, it's time to bring that spirit back.

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

Government Policies

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in witness of a disturbing trend in policy and legislation from this government since formation, in May of 2015, a trend that has no doubt contributed to the unprecedented decimation of investor confidence while undermining our economy's ability to claw its way back from the effects of low oil prices. Fully 45 per cent of Alberta businesses say that they expect full-time equivalent reductions in the next three months, and I have three articles here to table in support of this claim.

To be clear, Mr. Speaker, we do not hold the NDP responsible for the price of oil. We do however believe that the actions taken by this government have exacerbated the situation. But beyond this, it's this government's attitude toward private-sector interests in Alberta we find most disturbing. In the short time the NDP have wielded power, they have taken every opportunity to vilify business and, indeed, all those who dare to risk capital in hopes of modest profit in our province.

When it comes to corporate and personal tax increases, they tell Albertans that greedy business owners can afford it. When it comes to minimum wage increases, they call business owners who are concerned about their ability to remain solvent selfish. When it comes to Alberta's electricity companies, they paint them as profit-mongers who have earned billions on the backs of Albertans, but what they fail to mention is that these same companies have invested billions at no cost to the taxpayer in building Alberta's electricity generation infrastructure. These companies deserve our respect and gratitude, not the contempt they have received from this government.

We all know that, ideologically speaking, New Democrats are fans of neither private capital, the demon root word of capitalism, nor industry. They would rather create 10 public-sector jobs on the back of taxpayer debt than the hundred private-sector jobs we need. What's most disappointing to me is that they have clung to this misguided ideology at Albertans' expense. For Alberta's sake I hope they will listen to those who elected them and act accordingly.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Jean: While no one blames the Premier for the low price of oil, Albertans are tired of our province's finances being driven into the ground. Following multiple credit downgrades today's fiscal update

paints a very bleak picture indeed. The department of debt interest payments is quickly becoming one of the largest departments across this government: a \$10.8 billion deficit, multiple tax increases, and 13 per cent in new spending over the four years. Given that the Premier refuses to actually cut spending, how long does she think it will be until our next credit downgrade?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

1:50

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is apparently a cut week, an ideology week and also a cut week. Last week was a spend week. It's never clear to tell. You know, it's interesting, for sure.

The Q2 update was just presented to the people of Alberta today. It shows that we are more or less on track with what we outlined previously, and it shows that we are slightly ahead of the game. When we went into the last election, we said to Albertans: we are going into hard times, and you can have a government that has your back, or you can have a government that's going to blame you and download costs onto you and your family. We chose the former, and so did Albertans.

Mr. Jean: Here's an easy tip for some cost savings: don't throw out \$200 million in outdated government-run laundry services, or the Premier could try not spending an eye-popping \$1.4 billion on killing good jobs in Alberta's coal sector. I know Albertans don't care much for paying for international junkets to promote the carbon tax. The NDP could cut those, too, or just take the easy step to thin out the layers of bureaucracy through attrition. Will the Premier take just one of our Wildrose ideas to save Albertans from crippling levels of future debt?

Ms Notley: Well, I'll tell you one thing we won't do, Mr. Speaker. We will not follow the member opposite's first priority, which is to spend over \$2 billion on the wealthiest, most profitable corporations in the province, because that's their first spending priority. That is not what Albertans voted for. They voted for the exact opposite.

Mr. Jean: Today's announcement means every Alberta household will owe \$56,000 in debt by 2019. Here's why it's a problem. Eventually governments run out of spending other people's money and have to pay back the banks, and that money does come from Alberta taxpayers. At a time of record unemployment that means more taxes on Alberta's families. More taxes means less for families to spend on groceries, on their kids, or on taking care of all their loved ones. Will the Premier then start fixing the budget and commit to no more tax hikes to Albertans? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I think the really important thing that the members opposite like to try to forget is that even now, even with us moving ahead with the carbon levy – you know what? – Albertans have an over \$7 billion tax advantage over the next lowest taxed province in the country. So that is being maintained while at the same time we invest in teachers, we invest in nurses, we invest in Albertans, and we ensure that we have their back while we come through these hard economic times.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Carbon Levy

Mr. Jean: In just 34 days this NDP government's carbon tax will take effect. This tax will have severe implications for hard-working Albertans who are already suffering through one of the worst

economic downturns in recent memory. Albertans have been incredibly vocal in clearly stating that they do not want and cannot afford this NDP carbon tax. To the Premier: will the NDP cancel the January 1 implementation of this tax before it causes any further damage to our economy and everyday Albertans across our great province?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, just last week a significant group of Canadian corporate leaders came out to say that what Alberta is doing with pricing carbon is exactly – exactly – what our economy needs. Indeed, the TD Bank came out with a report saying that what we're doing with respect to pricing carbon is exactly what our economy needs. You know what else? What it will do is that it will help move our province toward reaching the kinds of environmental goals that our children and our grandchildren need us to start working on today.

Mr. Jean: The NDP knew this carbon tax was not going to be popular. That's why they didn't put it in their election platform, and now, with just over a month to go before it's implemented, they won't give Albertans a chance to have their say on this tax before they put it in place. Families are going to see the cost of filling up their cars, buying their groceries, and heating their homes go way up all because of this NDP carbon tax. To the Premier: before implementing the tax, will you please respect the will of Albertans and put it to a referendum?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, we are proud that we are leading the country in moving our nation forward in terms of taking action on climate change, something that is long overdue and something that will also coincidentally position our economy to be a leader world-wide. While we are doing that, we are ensuring that low- and middle-income families will receive a rebate so that should they reduce their carbon they will actually come out ahead.

Mr. Jean: The NDP insist on plunging ahead with the carbon tax, yet they still don't know what the full economic impact will be of the carbon tax. Municipal governments are trying to figure out how large a cost this tax will have on Albertans but aren't getting any answers at all from this government. In fact, the Lacombe county council wrote to the Premier, asking her about the financial impact of the carbon tax, but they still haven't heard back. To the Premier: have you still not figured out the numbers, or are they so bad that you just don't want Albertans to know them?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we know is that we will have over \$2 billion invested in green infrastructure in our municipalities. What we know is that we'll have over half a billion dollars invested in energy efficiencies, something that the members opposite, over there, forgot to do for 40 years. We didn't have an energy efficiency program in this province at all. Jaw dropping. Shocking. We are finally moving forward, and I'm very proud of that fact.

Energy Policies

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the NDP interfering in our electricity system will cost our province and taxpayers billions of dollars. Their ideological drive to wipe out coal generation in our province will mean rising costs, the end of low power prices like we're paying today, and higher taxes. We know that the impact of these changes could wipe out Enmax's profitability, and that means that property taxes in Calgary will go up as much as 4.5 per cent per year, every year. Will the Premier admit that her government didn't

understand the consequences when they decided to mess up our electricity system?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the fact that we have been able to move forward as effectively as we can on a number of different electricity files. We inherited a system that was falling apart, and we've been working diligently – diligently – to fix it. We are getting off coal, we're moving our economy forward, and we're creating stability and affordability in our electricity system at long last.

Mr. Jean: The cost of wiping out six fully-functioning, high-efficiency coal plants will ring in at roughly \$1.4 billion. Killing coal plants likely means that the town of Hanna, for instance, will lose hundreds of jobs, putting the whole town at risk, but this government doesn't seem to care at all. They're more interested in flying to Paris and Morocco than meeting with the hard-working men and women whose livelihoods are being destroyed right across the province. Eliminating coal generation means that we need up to \$25 billion in new generation, an investment that would be subsidized, of course, through Alberta taxpayers. Why is this government punishing Albertans during a recession?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, we are very proud to be moving forward and phasing out coal. But let me just say that as a result of some of our announcements last week, the coal compensation and the capacity market, one of the heads of the coal companies said, and I quote: the fact that we have this capacity market really enables us to convert some of our coal plants to gas, keep our workers working, keep those communities strong, and be able to provide capacity to the system as we go through the decades. That's not this government speaking. That's one of those industry leaders who actually has faith in our system.

Mr. Jean: All paid by Alberta taxpayers.

In the past 18 months this NDP government has introduced a carbon tax that they didn't campaign on; accelerated the phase-out of coal, that will cost Albertans billions and billions of dollars and devastate whole communities; overhauled our electricity system, that offered consumers some of the best electrical rates in Canada; and scared away investment by suing energy companies over long-standing contracts. It's quite a mess in a very short period of time. Does the Premier understand that none of these changes will lead to a more prosperous Alberta?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the status quo situation with our electricity market was this: there was only one other jurisdiction in North America that was still relying on that kind of electricity system. In Alberta we know that electricity would have capped out at \$999 per megawatt hour. That jurisdiction, Texas, in order to keep their system going, had to increase that to \$9,000 per megawatt hour, a one thousand per cent increase in volatility. I am not prepared to make Albertans put up with that kind of volatility for their risky, ideological experiments.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

2:00

Government Spending

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Over the last 18 months thousands of Alberta families have had to take a hard look at their household expenses and make some tough decisions to balance the

bank account in the face of lost jobs and reduced income. Albertans are making sacrifices, yet the government that they elected to spend their dollars wisely has proven itself incapable of making those same tough decisions in the face of this recession. To the Premier: why does your government refuse to acknowledge reality and adjust spending like Alberta families are doing every single day?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the last election the member opposite's party ran on the idea of firing nurses and sending 12,000 new kids to school that September without a new teacher. And you know what? Albertans said: no, that's not the way we invest in the future, that's not how we have each others' backs, that's not how we move forward. So we're going to go with what Albertans told us to do.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I congratulate the Premier on bragging about her \$7 billion tax advantage – I will remind her that it was \$11 billion two years ago – and that's before the carbon tax and the \$3 billion in debt from all the borrowing they're going to do.

Albertans expect their government to avoid borrowing for day-to-day operations, and the second-quarter fiscal results today reveal that operational spending continues to rise. To the Premier. Our caucus has provided just a few examples where you could significantly trim expenses without impacting the front lines. Why do you refuse to even try?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that increased our spending in this last quarter was a \$100 million addition to Human Services, and just last week we were hearing from members opposite about how that should be a priority. You can't have it both ways. Decisions aren't magical. When you make something a priority, then there are consequences to it, and we made that a priority.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. The Premier points to something that represents 1 per cent of the deficit that they're taking on this year alone. There's another 99 to try on, Premier. Don't quit yet.

Mr. Speaker, you know what? Eleven billion dollars is going to need \$3 billion in taxpayers' money just to service it without paying down the principal. To the Premier: when can Albertans expect your government to show how you plan to pay the billions and billions back that you're borrowing and when?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the plan is to establish a careful and prudent way forward that supports Albertans, that supports our schools, that supports our hospitals, that supports Human Services, that supports firefighting, that supports the things that Albertans count on. As we do that, we will carefully manage and reduce our spending in a way that gets us to an appropriate outcome with respect to balancing the budget.

But, you know, it's really quite rich for the member opposite to be talking about this because if you look at the way spending was done over the last ten years, it looks like an outline of the Rocky Mountains: no planning at all.

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

Provincial Fiscal Deficit and Coal Phase-out Costs

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today the government claimed that we have a \$10.8 billion deficit. Now, that

in itself is a very big number, but they haven't included the \$1.1 billion coal settlement because they say that they're still trying to figure out the accounting treatment. Well, that's like driving a hundred miles an hour but still trying to figure out if you're actually speeding. To the Finance minister. Your department is full of experts who have the answer; I just suspect that you don't like the answer. Will you confirm that, including the coal settlement, we actually have an \$11.9 billion deficit?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I will conclude and tell the House is that this member's staff was briefed fully on this this morning. The answer that I'm providing to the House is the same one that officials from Treasury Board and Finance provided earlier, and that is that this transition payment will start next year and be paid out over 14 years. That's the answer.

Mr. Clark: Today's announcement said that it's still to be figured out, but I don't know what's still to be figured out. This money is money that the government owes to others, which is the textbook definition of a financial liability. If you don't believe me, why don't we check the actual textbook. The public-sector accounting standards define liability as having a legal responsibility to pay, must be paid in a specific timeline, and the obligation to pay has already occurred. Again to the Minister of Finance: can you tell me which of these three does not apply to the coal settlement?

Mr. Ceci: What I will tell the member opposite is that we will start paying out the transition payments next year. Q2 is focused on this year. The officials have briefed people. Out of an abundance of caution we put that note in the Q2 update. That was occurring at the same time as we were concluding our Q2 deliberations, so we're being transparent, upfront. We'll start paying next year, not this year.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, there are plenty of liabilities that we are not currently paying that show up as liabilities.

Even if you didn't know the exact number of what that liability would be, you knew that during coal negotiations there would be a number. It's irresponsible and negligent but, I suppose, politically convenient not to include the coal settlement in the deficit estimation. Can you confirm here and now that in the Q3 update and beyond we will see a \$1.1 billion increase to future deficits?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. What I can confirm is that in our annual report we will include a contractual obligation as a note that will be present for all to see.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Softwood Lumber Export to the United States

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the United States Lumber Coalition submitted petitions to the U.S. Department of Commerce to request an investigation into Canada's softwood lumber. This means that our province's forest industry can expect higher duties on wood products exported to the United States. Because the United States is a key market for our forest products, this will have great impacts on Alberta's forest industry and the communities it sustains, including many communities in my constituency of West Yellowhead. To the minister . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, for the question.
The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the member for the question. Forestry is the backbone of the economy in 70 communities supporting 20,000 Albertans. It's a sustainable industry built on a renewable resource. The industry is not subsidized, as the Americans would have some believe, and I'm confident that the courts will once again agree.

Both Minister Bilous and I recently concluded trade missions to Asia. We need to continue to look for opportunities in these rapidly expanding markets. At the same time we will support the federal government's actions to fight this unfair trade action and continue to support good jobs in the forest sector.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that nearly 20,000 Albertans are employed in the forest industry, including hundreds of my constituents in Grande Cache, Hinton, and Edson, what will the minister do to fight this decision and support thousands of Albertans that work in the industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government will continue to work closely with the Alberta Forest Products Association and our federal counterparts to fight this unfair and punitive trade action. While this action is disappointing, it is not unexpected. We knew the Americans were gearing up, once again, for a fight. We shifted resources within the department to handle legal issues that might arise. I've also asked my officials for strategies to deal with the impacts of this action, keeping in mind that the Americans are looking for every excuse to justify their move. But at the end of the day, it's an international trade dispute, so it falls on the federal government to fight it in the courts.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the imposition of duties will reduce demand for Alberta products in the U.S., again to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: what is the government doing to support our forest industry during what will likely be a long dispute so that these communities can remain prosperous?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that we need to diversify Alberta's forest product trade. This is the fifth time the Americans have alleged unfair practices here in Canada. Every time their allegations have been untrue. I am confident that this will happen again. The fact is that our forest management practices are amongst the best in the world. This is something that our trading partners in Asia recognize, and this presents a great opportunity to increase trade. We must also look for opportunities here at home. This government will develop wood-first policies through the development of an Alberta wood charter. A wood charter will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from construction by using sustainable forest products. It will also stimulate . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

2:10 Health Care Wait Times

Mr. Barnes: Last week yet another report shed light on the wait time problems that continue to plague our incredibly expensive health care system. In fact, the problem seems to have only gotten worse since the NDP was elected, with wait times for medically necessary procedures far exceeding what health professionals deem

reasonable. The minister's own health data confirm a system moving in the wrong direction for Albertan's hard-earned dollars. Will the minister's legacy in this role be one of increased rationing or one of actual improvement?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to the report that I believe has been referenced as a Fraser Institute report. I look forward to seeing it tabled later in question period.

We are working to make sure that we have a stable, well-funded public health care system that helps to address the needs of Albertans. Addressing wait times: I think we have work to do in that area, Mr. Speaker, and I'm committed to addressing it as opposed to the members opposite who were proposing to cut billions of dollars from public services, which would have resulted in laying off nurses and teachers and increased wait times. That's not leadership. What we're doing is.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that wait times have worsened across a wide array of procedures, as confirmed by the government's own reporting, and given that patients and advocacy groups tell us that these excessive wait times cause tremendous physical and mental anguish, putting further pressure on our systems' needs, does the minister intend to actually do something for those living in pain and create efficiency in our bloated health care system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to highlight some of the things that we have done. We restored \$800 million in health care spending that was projected to be cut by the last government on their way out the door. We also have made significant improvements in terms of wait times for mental health treatment for young people and children, a 92 per cent reduction. I'm incredibly proud of that. Instead of a 13-day wait, these children now have what they need in terms of care the same day or the next day in either Edmonton or Calgary. We're building 2,000 more long-term care beds so that our seniors can live in communities instead of acute-care hospitals. We're moving forward, and those members are proposing that we move back to the '90s, which will result in deep cuts, and we are not doing that.

Mr. Barnes: More money into a broken system is like pouring water into sand.

Given that the minister's actions have not created any meaningful improvements and have not come with any expectations of results and since her promised cost curve bending has been blown apart by constant budget overruns, is it finally time that the minister check her ideology at the door and start to focus on real solutions that actually help Albertans who rely on the system that we so lavishly fund?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish that the research department for the Official Opposition would roll their sleeves up and actually look at data, not estimates put forward by the Fraser Institute. We have reflected on some of the specific data: a 92 per cent reduction in wait times for children with mental health needs. That's significant improvement, and I'm proud to stand up for those children, those families and continue to move forward.

Provincial Fiscal Deficit

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, earlier today the Finance minister released his second-quarter update, and it was interesting to compare his numbers with those released last week by his counterpart Minister Doherty in Regina. Saskatchewan is facing the same global oil price shocks as Alberta, to say nothing of potash and uranium. Because of lower revenue, their projected deficit has doubled to \$0.8 billion, only one-fourteenth of our own projected \$10.8 billion deficit. To the minister: have you called Minister Doherty, and have you asked him to share some of his spending restraint ideas with you?

Mr. Ceci: You know, I don't need any more spending ideas. What I do need is an economy that turns around. In 2017 we're seeing an uptick in the economy of 2.3 per cent. We are seeing that we're reducing our expenditures on operations. Those are the things that'll get us in the long run. Saskatchewan, frankly, has – what have they got? – a \$14 billion economy. Fourteen billion dollars. We're at \$300 billion. Their budget is \$14 billion; ours is \$50 billion.

Dr. Starke: Minister, Saskatchewan has a \$14 billion budget, not a \$14 billion economy. Get your numbers straight.

Mr. Speaker, given that the Saskatchewan Finance minister has released five pages' worth of ministry-by-ministry spending restraint initiatives, which I will table for this minister's edification, and given that these initiatives are trimming over \$217 million from that \$14 billion budget, a 1.5 per cent reduction, without laying off a single teacher, doctor, or nurse, to the minister: if you were doing your job as well as Minister Doherty, you would be able to realize \$777 million in savings. When can we expect you to do that?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this was answered by the Premier earlier. We will get back to a balanced budget in time. We are going to work on bolstering the economy. We are going to work on diversifying and investing and protecting Albertans through this downturn. We will get back to a balanced budget, and when we do – 2024.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, the Riders will win the Grey Cup long before then.

Given that today's Q2 update shows an increase in general debt-servicing costs of \$33 million and given that Saskatchewan's debt-servicing costs are forecast to actually decrease by \$5 million and given that Saskatchewan is quickly gaining on Alberta in having the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the country, which we used to be the undisputed leader in, to the minister: what measures are you taking to try to curb the growth of our debt and attendant debt-servicing costs, or are you simply too proud to ask for helpful advice from our neighbours?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, with regard to the fiscal plan we have before this government and Albertans, we will get to about 15.5 per cent debt to GDP by next year. We're at about 10 per cent now. I'm comfortable at 10 per cent debt to GDP. That's not the lowest in the country, but I'm comfortable with it, and we will get to lowering that when our economy picks up.

Vacancy Rate in Calgary

Mr. Panda: According to Friday's *Financial Post* close to 40 per cent of Calgary's available residential rental listings are

unoccupied. As of this March 15,000 households in Alberta are on a wait-list for social and affordable housing and housing supports. With higher supply, does the Minister of Seniors and Housing see the opportunity to get more people off the streets of Calgary, or is the NDP trying to implement rent controls?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government, even in these very difficult fiscal times, is showing our commitment to people with our investment of \$1.2 billion in affordable housing over five years in our capital plan. We are taking care of repairs. We inherited a billion dollars in deferred maintenance in units that were not kept up under the previous government, and we are investing in that right now, so we are working very diligently to support vulnerable Albertans.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the commercial real estate in Calgary is also suffering with an office vacancy rate of 25 per cent and continuing to rise and given that Alberta Infrastructure spends almost \$210 million leasing office space for the government every year, is the Minister of Infrastructure actively shopping for bargains on new premium office space so he can consolidate government offices in downtown Calgary and lower taxpayer expenses for the years to come?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Department of Infrastructure has an extensive program to consolidate office space, to move out of lease space, where possible, into government buildings, and to increase the density of employees. I'm sure that the department is always looking for a better deal for the taxpayer. I want to say that we are working consistently to reduce the amount of space that the government occupies, and that is something we inherited from the previous government.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that 11,400 Calgary businesses have vanished or moved in the first nine months of 2016 due to NDP economic policies and given that the NDP has a passion for driving away jobs and investment to other jurisdictions, hence the 10.2 per cent unemployment rate, how does the Minister of Economic Development and Trade propose to fill Calgary's vacant residential and commercial real estate? With Manitoba NDP staffers?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta jobs plan is making a difference in the lives of Alberta families by diversifying the economy and creating employment here in Alberta. We have new infrastructure projects added to the capital plan that are estimated to sustain over 10,000 jobs a year for over three years. We restored the STEP program, that was cut by the previous government, providing 2,700 jobs. Alberta's modernization of the royalty framework has led to increased drilling this year. By early fall 2016 more than 129 new wells had been approved, which is 135 new jobs. We're doing many things.

Forest Industry Issues

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, the softwood trade agreement with the U.S. has expired this past October, creating an unease in an already uncertain industry. Now we are hearing of efforts by U.S. lobby groups pressuring their government to impose trade

sanctions on our lumber imports. This could be devastating to our forest industry. Both the ministers of economic development and Agriculture and Forestry have recently travelled overseas on trade missions. Can you tell us today if any sizeable new agreements have been signed to send Alberta forest products to the Asian markets?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I continue and we will continue to stand for our forests – it's a viable industry in Alberta – stand for the communities and all the workers in the forest industry. The member is right. I did recently return from an Asian market, where I had an opportunity to speak with Canada Wood, both in China and South Korea, looking for what the member just suggested: extending our markets into those countries.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Loewen: So nothing new.

Given that the lumber industry is already highly trade exposed and given that the carbon tax will cause increases in fuel for mills, for the rail transportation, and fuel for transportation of the raw logs, all of which will do nothing but compound this disadvantage, to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: how does this government expect our forest industry to remain competitive in any market when your policies continue to handcuff industry and risk its continued viability?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely recognize the importance of the viability of the forestry sector to Alberta. It continues to be important. It relies heavily on exports, obviously the United States markets as well. We continue to support them in every way we can, expanding and extending those markets also into Asia, into South Korea and China in particular.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Loewen: Support them by raising taxes on them. Okay.

Given that I recently asked the environment minister about her caribou draft plan and given that it contains no timber supply analysis but makes recommendations that if implemented will cost hundreds of jobs in the forest sector, job losses that could be compounded by the lack of a softwood deal with the U.S., and considering companies already have uncertainty surrounding their forest management agreements, to the minister: will you state for the record that your government will do a proper timber supply analysis and consult with industry and affected communities before implementing any further action on your caribou draft plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To make it perfectly clear to this House and the member opposite, the Species at Risk Act is federal legislation. We're working with that legislation to make sure that we have something built here in Alberta, working with the forestry industry on a draft plan to do just that, to ensure absolutely the viability of species at risk but also to ensure that our forest industry remains working on the landscape, and we'll continue to do so.

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

Amber Athwal

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By now most of us have heard of the tragic story of Amber Athwal, a lovely four-year-old who has

yet to regain consciousness following a dental procedure. Her family is not satisfied with the response they have received from the Alberta Dental Association and College with regard to their ongoing investigation. They simply want to know what happened. To the hon. Minister of Health: will you commit to ensuring that the findings of this report are made public so that something like this never, ever happens in Alberta again?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I, too, had the honour of getting a chance to spend some time with Amber and her family. This is a very difficult time, so for them to welcome us, I think, is a tremendous credit to their strong spirit. We have been working with them. We at this point are confident and want to respect the college's process, but I want to be very clear. The family deserves answers, and so do all Albertans. So we'll be working to make sure that the college's process is complete, and then answers can be shared with the family and with Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that when I met with the Athwal family last week, they told me that they feel they have been left in the dark by the government and that despite any efforts that may have been made, they're hoping for increased communication from the Ministry of Health, again to the minister: will you personally ensure that more channels of communication are open with the family and that they receive the information they need in this difficult time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. We have been corresponding with them regularly. My deputy chief of staff and my office have recently spoken with them, and we'll make sure that – I believe they have his personal phone number, so it's even deeper than the ministry, somebody directly in my office, because it's important that they have an opportunity to feel heard. While it's a very difficult time and we might not be able to give them all the answers we want, we want to know what their questions are to be able to support them through this transition.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Amber's father, Raman Athwal, has been forced to quit his job in order to be by his daughter's side and given that this loss of income is compounded by the fact that this family does not fully know the extent of the brain injury suffered by their daughter, again to the minister: in order to ease the suffering from this tragedy, will you or someone from your ministry reach out to this family and help them access any and all support which they're entitled to moving forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Yeah. When we did have an opportunity to meet, I talked about what some of their nervousness was and some of their concerns. Certainly, having some support and liaising with Human Services is one of the areas around what types of supports might be available to help with transportation and those types of things when you have a child who's in a wheelchair. So we're working with them and co-ordinating with them and Human Services. I also want to say that Amber's mom made it really clear

that she wants Amber to be in an inclusive school environment, and it made me feel very proud to be able to say that no matter what, no matter how full Amber's recovery is, she has every right to attend a public school, and we'll make sure that we support them in that initiative, Mr. Speaker.

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

Bridge to Teacher Certification Program

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have more than a dozen schools in my constituency of Calgary-Shaw, and when I visit these schools, I can see that students want to develop skills and knowledge that will benefit them in the changing and more diversified economy. Many industry professionals and tradespeople have real-world experience to share and assist our teachers in the classroom. To the Minister of Education: what is the minister doing to support these types of collaboration in our schools?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much for the question. We all know that good jobs begin with a good education, and we also know that industry professionals with experience can help to prepare our students for success. So that's why we have initiatives that we're building up, like the bridge to teacher certification program. This program allows professionals to begin teaching in the classroom while still earning their postsecondary degree. We're hoping to expand this program considerably, and I believe it'll give us lots of good exposure for young people and industry professionals to work together in our classrooms.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the bridge to teacher program provides students with an opportunity to collaborate with local experts, to the same minister: what impact has this program had on our students and schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly seeing first-hand the positive impact of this program in our schools. Last month I was at Salisbury composite high school in Sherwood Park and met a professional there who was teaching cosmetology while working to earn her teaching degree, Zena Duguid. She's been paired up with a certified teacher through the bridge to teacher certification program and sharing real-world knowledge and experience with her students. I know first-hand that the kids really connect with industry professionals like this in different programs, in cosmetology and different trades, and it just gives kids another perspective that they wouldn't otherwise have.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what amount of funding is being provided to the bridge to teacher certificate program this year, and what are the plans for the program moving forward?

2:30

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've invested \$800,000 for the certification program in Budget 2016, and this funding will build professionals for, we're hoping, 10 different trades. We're starting to see medical professionals interested in this now as well, so it just

keeps expanding exponentially. I'll have further conversations with Alberta Education about expanding this program in the future.

We are hoping, of course, that this will help us to build a more diversified economy. We know that education is the cornerstone of a healthy economy, too, and that supporting programs like the bridge to teacher certification program will help to have our kids being ready for the future.

Didsbury Hospital Services

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, on November 8 I asked the Minister of Health a question regarding the slow death by cancellation of health programs at the Didsbury hospital. The associate minister responded with, "We are going to support health care where it's needed." When I asked her specifically if it was "a long, drawn-out plan to close the Didsbury hospital," she replied with, "We are not going to make ad hoc promises" and then said that we'll be using "a strategic approach." To the minister. I'm a little confused. Does your strategic approach include closing the Didsbury hospital?

Ms Hoffman: Not at all, Mr. Speaker. We're committed to making sure that we work with communities and support them. We have no plans to close the Didsbury hospital or any other hospital. We'll certainly be working with communities around challenges that might be encountered. I know that sometimes it's difficult to attract and retain staff in some of these communities, and we need our local communities to help us address some of those concerns. But we look forward to working with them, and there is no plan to shut down the Didsbury hospital.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Minister. Given that two major cuts have taken place at the hospital, including the most recent to the cardiac rehabilitation centre, which came as a complete shock to residents, doctors, and front-line workers, why was this cut made with no consultation of patients or doctors in the hospital and seemingly no consideration for aging patients who now have to drive to Calgary and pay \$500 for the same service?

Ms Hoffman: I'm very proud to be the Health minister in a government that believes in public, universally accessible health care, so I'd be happy to answer if you can provide details around the dollar amount you raised. That certainly doesn't reflect the values that we have around public, universally accessible health care, Mr. Speaker.

With regard to the specific program at the hospital itself I believe that their AHS zone co-ordinators are working on how best to ensure that everyone has access to the right services in the right place, and sometimes certain programs might need to be moved. But I'll be happy to follow up in further detail with the hon. member if he chooses to raise that question after . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, all patients have been asked to pay.

Given that this cut is real and will cost front-line jobs and potentially puts at risk the lives of those living in central Alberta, not to mention the cost and burden of having to drive back and forth to Calgary, and given that if you have a heart attack in central Alberta, you are 70 per cent more likely to die than having one in Calgary, will the minister please tell me why she's willing to make such a risky decision, and will she reverse this damaging cut at the Didsbury hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I know that some numbers were thrown around there, and I really hope that the member does follow up with me so that we can ensure that we are clear about what it is he's referring to when he says that patients are being asked to pay. I think that's important for us to be able to follow up on.

With regard to the strategic clinical network report regarding cardiac care, that was released publicly. There is a desire to increase capacity for cardiac care throughout Alberta, and we want to make sure that everyone, no matter where you live, whether you're in the central zone, north, south, Edmonton, or Calgary, you have access to the right care in the right place at the right time, Mr. Speaker.

Coal-fired Electric Power Plant Retirement

Mr. Fraser: As a paramedic you're trained to read people's voices, their tones, to pick up when they're in distress – the crackly voices, the tension, the fear – and that's exactly what I heard when I decided to call a few mayors in communities that would be impacted by the Terry Boston report, released last week. What was more concerning, they said that they hadn't heard anything from the minister's office in months: no further engagement, no briefing on what was in the report, and nothing that would explain the impact on families in their communities. They didn't even receive a copy of the report. Premier, you promised families impacted by this coal phase-out that they would be engaged. Why did you break that promise?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade is leading the process of engagement with the affected communities. His department has worked with over 40 stakeholders in this area across the province where we have post-2030 plants and even some of the communities where we were seeing some coal-fired shutdowns between now and 2030. Part of the work – and I will discuss it more in subsequent questions – is to ensure that we have the right regulatory framework for coal-to-gas conversion.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Fraser: Minister, respectfully, if you'd listen to these mayors and you'd talk to them, they're genuinely concerned and afraid.

Given that this government has passed the buck to electricity companies, stating that the \$1.1 billion settlement will cover transition – and that doesn't seem like a lot of money spread out amongst dozens of coal communities – and that what's more disheartening is that you don't seem to care about these rural families, why do you think it's appropriate at all for this government to skip out on these conversations with these families, period?

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, earlier this year the Minister of Economic Development and Trade met with over 40 community leaders from municipalities, First Nations, and labour organizations. We also received more than 800 submissions from the public on this plan. Our three-member panel will travel to affected communities early in the new year, but what we announced on Thursday provides us the architecture and a policy framework in which to ensure that we are doing the right kinds of transition for these communities, including coal-to-gas conversion, where it's economically achievable and where the investors want to make those decisions.

Mr. Fraser: Again, respectfully, if my job was being taken away and the announcement came, I would like to know either before or very shortly after, not months later.

Given that these families are still left in the dark regarding their income, their social well-being, their future and given that you haven't contacted the leaders of these communities, what commitment can you make today to reach out and appropriately engage the leaders of these families, who need answers today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the well-being of the workers in the community has been at the forefront of our minds as we've been moving through this plan for what happens 14 years from now. That is why the Minister of Economic Development and Trade has met with over 40 community leaders and others, that is why we have ensured that the companies that we negotiated with are making investments back into those communities, and that is why we have ensured the regulatory framework that is required to do coal-to-gas conversion and that will keep the municipal tax base and ensure jobs in those communities into the future.

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

Mr. Dach: Well, thank you very much. I'm very proud and pleased today to rise for the first time in question period as one of the fabulous five members of the overflow government caucus who sit to the left of Mr. Speaker.

Legal Aid

Mr. Dach: As a former volunteer probation officer I know firsthand that there are several parts of the justice system that need to function together for it to work effectively. An important piece of that puzzle is legal aid. Last year alone Legal Aid Alberta served close to 300,000 Albertans. To the Minister of Justice: what is the government doing to ensure that legal aid services are available to Albertans who need them?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the critical question. Our government understands the vital role that legal aid plays in a functioning justice system. That's why we've invested an additional \$9.4 million this year, bringing legal aid's total budget to \$77.9 million. Since taking office, our government has increased funding to legal aid by 20 per cent.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I have heard concerns from my constituents in Edmonton-McClung about whether legal aid is reaching the Albertans who need it the most, to the same minister: what is the government doing to support low-income Albertans with serious legal issues?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for another important question. We have increased the qualifying income threshold for legal aid, which means that more people are able to qualify for services. There's also been a change in the scope of service to ensure that we're focusing to a greater degree on assistance to low-income Albertans. The fact that Alberta needs a predictable and long-term plan to deliver legal aid services is something that we are working very hard to achieve.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there is an ongoing review of legal aid, again to the same minister: what is the status of that review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. Our goal with the legal aid review was to ensure that we had an efficient and sustainable legal aid program providing service to low-income Albertans for years to come. We continue to engage with stakeholders, including Legal Aid Alberta, the Law Society, and the legal community as well as service providers and the courts. This review is ongoing, and I look forward to sharing more information as we move forward.

2:40

Members' Statements

(continued)

Water Management

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, I'm going with the Tragically Hip theme again. In 1989 the Hip released the song *Trickle Down*.

Thoroughly discredited by none other than the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, trickle-down economics stifles growth and creates damaging income inequality. It remains a mystery why the conservative parties continue to pursue this failed ideology. But the kind of trickle-down I'm pursuing has to do with the way our most precious resource trickles down through the landscape. That resource, of course, is water.

In order to effectively respond to a changing climate, we must take water management seriously. Climate change mitigation is about carbon, but climate change adaptation is about water. Intact ecosystems slow and moderate the impact of climate change by preserving the water cycle. Indeed, our glaciers act as the thermostat for North America.

Alberta is fortunate to have some of the most significant headwaters in western Canada. As the world experiences and prepares for a changing climate, it is critical for our prosperity that we ensure Alberta's supply of fresh water can meet our future demands. Global water scarcity will not necessarily be defined by direct transfers of liquid water but by how much is traded in the form of water embodied in food. This could greatly advantage Alberta's agricultural sectors but – and this is the crucial point – only if we are able to address land-use practices as they relate to water quantity and quality. Alberta's water future depends on the ecological integrity of our eastern slopes. Conservation of intact wild spaces like these is a deeply rooted Alberta value consistent with the goal of water security.

Like the Tragically Hip, I'm also waiting on the trickle-down. Water takes time to get around. When it comes to water security, it's just a matter of a trickle-down.

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

Legacy Children's Foundation

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to talk about an important organization in my riding, the Legacy Children's Foundation. Since 2006 the Legacy Children's Foundation has been working hard to create all-inclusive music programming in Alberta that engages financially challenged families and vulnerable youth.

I want to congratulate Legacy on receiving funding to continue their work across the province. They've received a \$20,000 grant

from the municipality of Wood Buffalo and a \$30,000 grant from the Red Cross disaster relief fund to buy instruments that were destroyed during the devastating fire that raged through Fort McMurray.

I'm proud to say that Legacy bases its operations out of my riding. The organization and its executive director, Darryl Wernham, work tirelessly to improve the lives of children and youth. They believe that all children and youth have the potential to grow into self-reliant, contributing citizens.

Through Darryl I had the pleasure of meeting a young woman who was having a hard time in school and who started learning guitar through their programming. This spring she played on stage at the Juno awards in Calgary.

Earlier this year Legacy received a community initiative program grant from our government that went directly to help youth living in poverty in Calgary. With the money Legacy was able to buy turntables to start a DJ program. These initiatives are a perfect example of how our government and community partners can work together to improve the lives of youth and families across Alberta.

I would like to thank Darryl and their board of directors and everyone involved in Legacy Children's Foundation. The work you all do is invaluable to the countless youth you help every day. I would also like to point out that Legacy is currently running an Indiegogo campaign to help with funding. Their goal is to raise \$50,000 for their gift of music long-term mentorship program. I urge all fellow members to make a pledge today and help Legacy continue their work across Alberta.

Thank you.

2016 Football Championships

Mr. Rodney: Congratulations to the Calgary Stampeders on one of the best seasons in history: 16 wins, including the complete dismantling of the CFL's second-best team in the western final; winning every single home game; most points scored; fewest sacks allowed; most wins by a rookie head coach, Dave Dickenson, the coach of the year; rookie of the year, DaVaris Daniels; most outstanding offensive lineman, Derek Dennis; most outstanding Canadian, Jerome Messam; and most outstanding player, quarterback Bo Levi Mitchell, with a league high 32 touchdowns and an .853 winning percentage, the best in league history.

Apparently, however, the Ottawa Redblacks did not get that memo. After the Stamps overcame a 20-point deficit, they could have claimed the biggest comeback in Grey Cup history if they'd punched it in from the two-yard line with only seconds remaining, but instead Ottawa, with a losing record in the regular season, played their best game of the year and scored the biggest upset in Grey Cup history in overtime. Congrats to the Redblacks and to former Calgary Stampeder Henry Burris, the oldest quarterback to win the cup.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, the news was similar for the Calgary Dinos, whose starting quarterback was injured in the first quarter but came within 23 yards and 23 seconds of winning the Vanier Cup.

Quick note to Mr. Commissioner: if you want the Vanier and Grey cups to remain Canada's biggest parties and if you want to engage and inspire newer and younger Canadians while increasing attendance and revenues, please start the season in June, end it in October, and expand the CFL to 12 teams. We can do that. Canada is ready.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, to everyone within the U of C and the Stampeders organizations: thank you for an incredibly entertaining year. It wasn't the first time that the better teams lost, and it won't be the last, but I promise you: we will be back, and we'll be better as we learn lessons from this year.

Mr. Speaker, we were dreaming of big wins this weekend in honour of number 31, Mylan Hicks, who was tragically killed earlier this fall. I know that everyone in Alberta was hoping to have his name etched on the cup. I just trust that the family knows: no matter what, we will never forget you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mylan.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give oral notice of a bill for tomorrow's Order Paper, that bill being Bill 34, Electric Utilities Amendment Act, 2016, which will be sponsored by the hon. Minister of Energy. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 35 Fair Elections Financing Act

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Fair Elections Financing Act.

This bill ensures that Albertans have a fair, democratic, and modern electoral system. Alberta's election spending and contribution laws have lagged behind other Canadian jurisdictions, and it's time we did more than just catch up. We want to lead the country in limiting the influence of big money on elections. It's why we passed Bill 1 last year to ban corporate and union donations, and it's why we're taking the next step with these amendments.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want an electoral system where good ideas matter more than deep pockets and where integrity and transparency of the system is paramount. With these amendments in Bill 35 we can provide them with exactly that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Minister of Transportation.

2:50 Bill 36 An Act to Enhance Off-highway Vehicle Safety

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and introduce Bill 36, An Act to Enhance Off-highway Vehicle Safety.

The amendments we are proposing would require people who use off-highway vehicles on public land to wear helmets during OHV operations. Mr. Speaker, if it passes the House, this bill will help to reduce thousands of unnecessary injuries and dozens of deaths that Alberta's OHV community suffers every year.

There are certain provisions within the proposed amendments, including exemption for Alberta's farming and ranching community and for operation on First Nations and Métis settlement land. It is our intention to support Alberta's long-standing OHV tradition by requiring people to wear helmets whenever they are operating an off-highway vehicle on public land.

I look forward to the conversation with all of the colleagues in this Chamber. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 36 read a first time]

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

Bill 209 Active Schools Week Act

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to request leave to introduce a bill being the Active Schools Week Act, Bill 209.

Studies show that when students get a small amount of exercise before school, they arrive more focused, attentive, and ready to learn. As rates of obesity and chronic disease and provincial health care costs continue to rise, it's more important than ever that we encourage Albertans from a young age to build habits that will improve their physical and mental health. This bill mandates that the first full week in October be named active schools week and that all Alberta schools have participatory events or activities that encourage students to walk, bike, or use other active means to get to school.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss and debate this bill with all members of this Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a document that will clear up some misinformation respecting our supports for foster and kinship families. As you know, our commitment includes stable funding for Human Services, although it was suggested by the Member for Calgary-Elbow that we have made some cuts to that.

I'm tabling a quick facts sheet, and I have the requisite number of copies. It shows the government investments in this area, including the total budget for foster care over the past three years, the number of approved foster and kinship homes, and additional investments in training. The March 2015 budget proposed by the third party reduced foster care funding to \$163 million while our 2015 fall budget included a \$7.5 million increase for foster care supports to make it \$170.5 million. As part of Budget 2015 approximately \$1.4 million of additional funding addressed the increase in monthly respite costs and annual vacation allowances provided to caregivers. Caregivers also received an additional \$50 per month for respite support, increasing respite days from once to twice a month.

The Speaker: Hon. member, there's no need to read the document. You simply could table it for the House.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that there were no cuts made to Human Services for foster care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Minister of Treasury Board and Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table two reports. The first is the requisite number of copies of the 2016-17 second-quarter fiscal update and economic statement.

The second is the requisite number of copies of the 2016-17 second-quarter Alberta heritage savings trust fund report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of the report I talked about in question period. Although the Health minister does not like the source, she cannot deny the results. As a matter of fact, her own information supports the same. We are now second last in wait times in Canada.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the same speech I gave to the minister.

Mr. Barnes: Five copies showing that access to a waiting list is not access to health care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the five copies required of a letter from the Lacombe county reeve, referred to by the leader during question period, in which the reeve asked the government to provide all relevant information to all citizens of Alberta regarding the financial impact of the proposed carbon levy.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: The Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of a document from the October edition of Windpower Monthly. This paper recently named our very own Minister of Environment and Parks as one of the world's most influential renewables policy-makers. Investors around the world know that Alberta is open for business when it comes to renewable energy.

The Speaker: The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of the document that I referenced during question period, entitled Spending Decisions Backgrounder, from the Saskatchewan Department of Finance. No speech.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite five copies of three articles referenced in my member's statement today: Nearly 50 per cent of Alberta entrepreneurs may lay off people in [the] next 3 months; Alberta small business confidence wavers; and Three-quarters of Alberta entrepreneurs oppose expedited phase-out of coal generated electricity.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Why, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of the document I referenced during question period, which, I'm sure, will be of great interest to the Minister of Finance: the public sector accounting standards, concepts and principles, section PS 1000 to 1300, which very clearly define liabilities. I have the requisite five copies and look forward to a long, thoughtful discussion with the Minister of Finance about the same.

The Speaker: Government House Leader, you have a request?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would respectfully request the unanimous consent of the House to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a number of distinguished guests. Denise Pelletier is an HR practitioner, author, speaker, and traumatic brain injury survivor. She is a strong advocate for helmet use on ATVs. Joining her today is her father, Leo Pelletier. Brent Hodgson is the president of the Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association, which is dedicated to providing motorized recreational opportunities and which advocates for the safe use of off-highway vehicles. Laura Nelson is the executive director of the Farm Safety Centre, which promotes safe agricultural practices and also supports the use of helmets on off-highway vehicles. I would ask that Denise, Brent, and Laura rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, I hesitate to mention it, but it is 3 o'clock, and we are ready to go to Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Motions for Returns

Primary Care Networks Review

M22. Mr. Barnes moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of documents or reports prepared by or on behalf of the government, excluding documents that constitute confidential advice to the minister and excluding data and information that is specific to an individual or a specific primary care network, from May 22, 2015, to March 7, 2016, pertaining to the financial review of primary care networks conducted by the Minister of Health, as referenced during consideration of the Ministry of Health's main estimates on November 16, 2015.

[Debate adjourned November 7: Mr. Cooper speaking]

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

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to what is a very important question. The challenge is, Mr. Speaker, that we've heard from the government that what they intend to do is to amend the question to ask the question that they want to answer, not the question that's helpful for Albertans to know but, clearly, the question that they would have preferred my hon. colleague to ask.

3:00

As you know, we had a chance to speak briefly about this a couple of weeks ago. We have this continued trend of lack of accountability on behalf of this government. This government, when they were the fourth party – I remember the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood standing in this very place, a little bit to the left of me, which really should have been a lot to the left of me, but he stood in his place on numerous occasions and spoke to questions just like this. The government of the day, the now third party, used to do this exact same thing.

This government, Mr. Speaker, while running for election, often promised that they wouldn't ever be like the previous government. Now we see them doing the exact same thing, and that is trying to hide information that's critically important to Albertans with respect to their health care. As you can see, the question is with respect to the financial review of primary health care networks that was conducted by the Minister of Health when we were at main estimates on November 16 last year.

It's incredible to me that throughout this process the time to get information is so delayed. We've seen this government delay FOIP requests. We saw the FOIP commissioner, the Privacy Commissioner, just two weeks ago make some very, very significant claims and express some significant concern around the direction that this government is going.

The Speaker: Are there other members who wish to speak to Motion for a Return 22?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to close debate.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As my colleague has just clearly outlined, here we have a government saying one thing in opposition and now clearly wanting to answer a question that doesn't fully involve what was asked and what we were looking for.

Why it's so critical, why it's so important to have internal working order documents for this government: the first reason is primary care. How often do we hear that acute care, that hospitals and our front-line workers are great and necessary, but they're not the answer? They're not answer to improving many, many Albertans' quality of life. They're not the answer to wellness and prevention and mental health and all those things that we spend hours and hours debating and tens and tens of thousands of taxpayers' dollars on. Here we had an opportunity for the government to show us – to show us – you know, what they're considering, what their plans are, if any. Maybe that's what they're hiding, but we'll let Albertans decide.

It dates back to how these primary care networks were set up, Mr. Speaker, by the last government. The idea of our great doctors and our mental health people and our dietitians and our physiotherapists and our allied health people, as I hear them called, doing so much for Albertans: I'm told now that the idea was to put these different primary care networks throughout the province and let them develop independently so they could all work on their strengths and their own individual ideas.

But, Mr. Speaker, so much of the criticism of them has been that that at times has failed because what has been best practice in one area was not shared with another. Then we've looked at a situation where: did Albertans, did the taxpayer, who was so willing to pay for this, you know, to help somebody with mental health or wellness or prevention, get the value that they could have achieved otherwise? That's why those internal working documents would have been so crucial. They could have showed us that the government actually cared, cared about helping Albertans and cared about value for our hard-earned tax dollars. Instead, we have a situation where the government is clawing back surpluses, they're not clawing back surpluses. Are they communicating? Are they reaching out to primary care networks? Who knows? Obviously, this government doesn't want to tell us.

I would ask all my colleagues to vote against the question as amended, and I would ask this government to please provide the information to truly help Albertans, all Albertans, with those things that are past the acute care and the emergency care but those things that can truly make a difference. A good start would be sharing

internal working documents with the 87 representatives of Alberta's 4.3 million people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion for a Return 22 as amended lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:07 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

Against the motion:

Aheer	Fitzpatrick	McKittrick
Anderson, S.	Fraser	Miller
Babcock	Goehring	Nielsen
Barnes	Gotfried	Orr
Carlier	Hinkley	Piquette
Carson	Horne	Renaud
Connolly	Hunter	Rodney
Coolahan	Jabbour	Rosendahl
Cooper	Jansen	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Kazim	Sucha
Cyr	Kleinsteuber	Sweet
Dach	Littlewood	Taylor
Dang	Loyola	Turner
Drever	Luff	Westhead
Drysdale	Malkinson	Woollard
Totals:	For – 0	Against – 45

[Motion for a Return 22 as amended lost]

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, just one clarification. The division that was just called was on the amendment?

The Speaker: Motion for a Return 22 as amended.
The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Calgary Emergency Medical Services

M23. Mr. Barnes moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of internal working documents or reports prepared by or on behalf of the government between May 22, 2015, and March 7, 2016, pertaining to the review conducted by the Minister of Health into the decision to incorporate Calgary emergency medical services into a central dispatch system, as referenced during Oral Question Period on December 8, 2015.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel this is a very, very important question. It gets to the heart of local decision-making, it gets to the heart of communication and consulting between the provincial government and the duly elected representatives of our municipalities, and it gets at the heart of value for hard-earned tax dollars.

We maybe all remember the story of the building that Alberta Health Services leased for EMS in Calgary and then basically never occupied it for that reason, and now the building appears to be drastically underutilized. I think the number was \$60 million that it's going to cost Alberta taxpayers over the next five years. That number is not drastically underutilized.

You know, we have this system where – and I'll just talk about it in a big way for a second. We're spending over 21 and a half billion dollars this year. I think the NDP government is already \$260 million over budget, and the costs grow and grow. At the same time,

on their own websites and by independent third parties the results are slipping. We are finishing more and more consistently in the bottom of the pack when it comes to wait times, when it comes to transplants, when it comes to emergency response.

What better way, Mr. Speaker, for the government to engage all Albertans and maybe particularly the 87 of us that sit in here with the opportunity to discuss what works, how we could make it better? Clearly, what works in this case is what the Mayor of Calgary said some time ago, and that was: let Calgarians, let local people, best allocate resources to needs.

It's also clear that there was some miscommunication, some uncertainty between the ministry and Alberta Health Services. They seem to be on different pages. Alberta Health Services wanted to move towards centralization. The minister seemed less sure. How confusing for local decision-makers. Mr. Speaker, that would be bad enough if it was a road or electricity or something that would be necessary for making our economy stronger, but, my goodness, this is life and death. This is EMS services.

It is clear now that certain plans were in the works that were not compatible with the goals of local decision-making. We've kind of backtracked. We're kind of in this no-man's-land, and we can't stay there, especially when we've leased a building that is millions of dollars and is now underutilized, especially when there is some uncertainty on the best way to help Calgarians.

There's a review under way, apparently. The Minister of Health promised that, but we need to see the evidence of if this review is under way and what it's looking into. Then, of course, Mr. Speaker, maybe the most pertinent step: we need to share this information with the public. That sunlight, that transparency is what will lead to a better system, is what will lead to cost savings, is what will lead to helping Albertans. I think it's only fair that communities that have been grossly and greatly affected by centralization have the exact same access to information that the government does so they can look at the process and see where they fit in, to see how they could help more Albertans, more Calgarians.

3:30

You know, if the minister is reviewing this information, Albertans, especially Calgarians, need to see what the minister sees on matters like this that have a direct impact on their community, a direct impact on their families, a direct impact on their neighbours and friends, the information, Mr. Speaker, pertaining to the review conducted by the Minister of Health into the decision to incorporate Calgary emergency medical services into a centralized dispatch system and the miscommunication around what the city of Calgary wants, the miscommunication between Alberta Health Services and the Minister of Health and all of us with the goal in mind of working together, of making it so Albertans and Calgarians are truly served as best as they can be with our limited tax dollars. So, Mr. Speaker, I will ask all my colleagues in the House to please support the following motion, and I look forward to receiving this pertinent, necessary information from our government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite has filed a motion relating to the incorporation of Calgary EMS into a central dispatch system. On behalf of the Minister of Health I move that Motion for a Return 23 be amended as follows: (a) by striking out the phrase "internal working" and (b) by adding "excluding documents that constitute confidential advice to the minister" after "government."

The amended motion for a return would read as follows: that

an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of documents or reports prepared by or on behalf of the government, excluding documents that constitute confidential advice to the minister, between May 22, 2015, and March 7, 2016, pertaining to the review conducted by the Minister of Health into the decision to incorporate Calgary emergency medical services into a central dispatch system, as referenced during Oral Question Period on December 8, 2015.

I am proposing this amendment to reflect our responsibilities under FOIP section 22(1) regarding cabinet and Treasury Board confidences.

The Minister of Health has been unwavering on her statement that she's going to make the right decision for Calgary and the province. Our government is very proud of the respectful and collaborative relationship it has with the city of Calgary, and the minister has heard the mayor's valid points about the plan as it was implemented by the previous government. The Minister of Health has directed AHS to pause on the changes to EMS while we negotiate an effective shared solution that will improve EMS dispatch in Calgary and its surrounding communities. I am very optimistic that Albertans will get better emergency response service as a result of these negotiations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there other members who would like to speak to the amendment as proposed by the Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Health? To the amendment, Cypress-Medicine Hat?

Mr. Barnes: To the amendment, please, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I'm against this. I'm surprised that again the current government is trying to hide behind hopes, and hope is not an acceptable strategy.

Just a short time ago the Privacy Commissioner outlined how freedom of information requests are apparently slower and, you know, more infringed upon than even the last government's. My goodness, when is this government going to learn that it's Albertans' system, it's Calgarians' system? I said it earlier. If we put some sunlight, some transparency on the internal working documents, not the confidential advice but the internal working documents – let's see what we're looking at. Let's see how we can get more value for Albertans and for Calgarians, and let's see how we can get better service.

We've seen a government that says that it's going to do it differently, says that it's going to do it better, but we're not seeing that, Mr. Speaker. So I would strongly encourage all of my colleagues in the House that are not part of cabinet to vote against – to vote against – this amendment and ask the government to provide more information so when we return to our constituencies, many of which, of course, are in Calgary, we have more complete, robust, and wholesome answers, that we can tell Calgarians, as to where their tax dollars are going and how we can make the system better.

Again, I just feel the need to say once more that we see report after report showing how Alberta's system is slipping, how where we used to be the top in transplants and waiting times and those kind of things, we're now last or second last in spite – in spite – of good, good front-line workers, in spite of over \$21 billion of taxpayers' money put into the system. You know, maybe the thing that is lacking is the transparency, the chance for some sunshine and some innovation.

So please, colleagues, vote against this amendment, and let's try to make Alberta better for all Albertans. Thank you.

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support my colleague in his advocacy to have members of the Assembly vote against this particular amendment. I'd just like to highlight an article, that I'll be happy to table in the House, that I think speaks to the culture that's being created in this government and a lack of desire for transparency and openness to providing information.

I know that while I may have forgotten exactly where we were in the process recently, I know that you'll remember from a few weeks ago, while I was chatting about the ability that the House has to call for documents – I get that the deputy deputy deputy House leader rose and suggested that there were issues around caucus confidentiality. But the fact of the matter is that the Assembly has the ability to require the production of those documents if the Assembly has the will, and while cabinet may not have a significant desire, it's in the ability of the House to call upon cabinet to produce those documents. All it takes is a few private members to go ahead and support that desire. I'd encourage those members of the Assembly particularly who aren't in cabinet to support that, to support openness and transparency because the decisions that cabinet makes are important to all Albertans – not just to the government and not just to the bureaucracy but to all Albertans – so that ought to be shared with everyone.

As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, this document speaks to the culture that's being created in the government, a culture that doesn't encourage transparency and openness but does the opposite. And I'll be happy to table the document that I referenced. It is a CBC article dated October 27, 2016. The headline is FOIP Commissioner Orders Investigation of Alberta Justice.

While I recognize that here we're speaking about a motion for a return with respect to the Minister of Health and we see the Minister of Health dodging, in many respects a motion for a return or a written question is much like a FOIP request except that the opposition or, in this case, my hon. colleague the private Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat shouldn't have to jump through all of the same sort of hoops. Mr. Speaker, if you've put any FOIP requests in, I'm sure you'll see that there are a lot of them – a lot of hoops, that is – that often result in an initial: no; we won't tell you that. Then there's a significant amount of appeal process and so on and so forth. That shouldn't be the case inside the Chamber, but here we have it; it is.

3:40

This culture that's being created – and I'll mention specifically the document, where it says:

Alberta's freedom of information commissioner has ordered an investigation into whether Alberta Justice wilfully attempted to mislead or obstruct the commissioner, or altered or falsified a record to evade FOIP requests.

Now, the Privacy and FOIP Commissioner, in ordering the investigation, accepted a recommendation from the former Nova Scotia FOIP commissioner, who is actually having to adjudicate the inquiry because it could be putting the FOIP commissioner, who essentially reports to Justice, in a bit of a bind.

Now, in this case the FOIP commissioner's request for the investigation is specific to tobacco litigation, but in a letter released to the CBC, Clayton said that she had opened up an offence file and retained a certain Edmonton private investigator to conduct the investigation.

Clayton said her office would usually contact special prosecutions at Alberta Justice at the outset of an investigation and arrange to meet with a designated Crown . . . [but] said that in this case, "I don't see how my office can work with a designated Crown prosecutor from Alberta Justice since any potential offences may involve Alberta Justice, who would be in a conflict advising my office."

Therefore, by separate letter she's requested that the Minister of Justice and Sol Gen appoint an independent special prosecutor to work with her office.

This is exactly the type of problem that we have with this government and, quite frankly, the former government as well, but when this government was elected, Albertans were hoping that they would see a change. I know that my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake has spent some significant amount of time working to try and ensure that access to information can be granted, but what we see is more roadblocks being put up by that.

Mr. Speaker, I actually believe that we put a FOIP request around this particular issue with respect to the documents and internal working documents but had limited success there, so we thought: "Well, you know what? This government believes in openness and transparency, or at least that's what they told everyone. Why don't we go ahead and do a motion for a return? I'm sure they'll be happy to provide the information." Unfortunately, that's not what we have seen. We've seen this government doing exactly what they're doing in Justice, in the words of this particular journalist – and I'll just double-check to make sure – when they asked the question "whether Alberta Justice wilfully attempted to mislead or obstruct the commissioner, or altered or falsified a record to evade FOIP requests." These are significant and serious claims, and it was a big enough concern to the Privacy Commissioner that she went ahead and wrote this letter and so on and so on.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that perhaps the next time I'll be able to speak about this issue of the government not doing the right thing. Just last week we saw the Privacy Commissioner make statements that she didn't feel like she should have to order a government body to follow the law. I look forward to referencing the exact quote from the Privacy Commissioner because one thing I know for certain is that the Privacy Commissioner is doing her job with respect to trying to get information to Albertans. It certainly appears that this government isn't doing their job in respecting the FOIP process, and now we see them not respecting the Assembly in the way in which they ought.

I strongly encourage members of this House to vote against this amendment, and I strongly encourage members of this House to think about not just my words, Mr. Speaker, because I know that oftentimes the government objects to things that I say, but about an independent commissioner of the Assembly who has very similar, strong words directed at this government. It's my hope that they will take that into consideration as they oppose this amendment. Should they accept the amendment, I hope that what we don't see is the government making a decision to then oppose the question altogether and not provide any information, as we saw in the last question.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other individuals who would like to speak to the amendment?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:47 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Miller
Babcock	Horne	Nielsen
Carlier	Jabbour	Piquette
Carson	Jansen	Renaud

Connolly	Kazim	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Sucha
Dach	Loyola	Sweet
Dang	Luff	Turner
Drever	Malkinson	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Mason	Woollard
Goehring	McKittrick	

Against the motion:

Barnes	Drysdale	Orr
Cooper	Gotfried	Rodney
Cyr	Hunter	Taylor
Totals:	For – 35	Against – 9

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Are there any other speakers to the original motion as amended?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to close.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Things have been kind of interesting in here this afternoon. If I've got it figured out, it seems like the government, the NDP caucus, will – you know, should I be happy with maybe just getting part of what I asked for, or should I encourage a system where the government closes the door totally on transparency and openness of the system, which is what just happened in that last vote? We saw a government that totally turned down an opportunity to provide a little information. To provide a little information. [interjections] We're still confused over here.

The Speaker: Through the chair, please.

Mr. Barnes: I guess, you know, we'd like to have as much information as possible. We'd like to have the government be open and transparent. We'd like to reduce or eliminate articles like the one my hon. colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills talked about, where the government was totally castigated and criticized for being worse than the previous government for openness and FOIP and transparency.

My goodness, in my four and a half years of being in here, it surprises me that we have to FOIP information as much as we do. It surprises me. It surprises me that, for the benefit of the people I represent, for the benefit of Albertans, we are not given more information so that we can make the system better for all, again, especially in this case, where there were the three entities involved – the city of Calgary, Alberta Health Services, and the ministry – that had huge, huge communication difficulties all the time. Tens of thousands of taxpayers' dollars were being spent on a near empty building.

You know, here we are. I guess I'll just sit back and see what the government decides to do, but again I would ask each and every one of you to vote according to providing more openness, more sunshine, more transparency to all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 23 as amended carried]

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

Alberta Health Services Lawsuits

M24. Mr. Barnes moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of lawsuits in which Alberta Health

Services was, as of March 31, 2011, named as a defendant, indicating the cause of action and amount of damages claimed.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. For a number of reasons I feel this is a very, very pertinent, very, very important question. First of all, in my constituency office a number of people come in and talk, usually with a lot of care and concern for neighbours, friends, and loved ones, about lack of access, lack of surgery opportunities, wondering why, then wondering sometimes whether it's pharmaceutical situations and wondering how they can truly make the system better. Some speak a lot about how they end up going to Montana, to Kalispell and Great Falls, because they want to return to productive lives, and they can't wait the length of time that the rationing of Alberta Health Services has caused. So they go to Montana and spend tens of thousands of dollars to get their surgery done.

Mr. Speaker, the ones that really, you know, make me think longer and harder are the ones that feel that they've been so wronged, they go to a lawyer. They actually go to the extent to file a claim, to spend money, to cause that extra stress and concern on their family. When it's gotten to that point, it's a situation where we, as the people that are given the oversight of the system by Alberta voters, if we had this information, could really help make the system better.

4:10

I'm sure there are a myriad of solutions and answers, whether it's back to the primary care networks, where we direct an Albertan to an allied health worker, whether it's mental health or a dietitian or physiotherapy. Maybe it's a system of ensuring that our good front-line workers, whether they're nurses or doctors or aides, have the opportunity to understand something better. This is the kind of information that those of us that aren't in cabinet and government – and that's the vast, vast majority of us. If we had this, we could truly make the system better. We could help Albertans not go through that stress, that monetary setback of having to go in a direction that I'm sure they do with only the most seriousness of thought and concern.

Mr. Speaker, I'll ask all my colleagues that are here today to ask that this question be answered, to please, please support this, with the idea that, once again, sunshine is the best way to make the system better. Openness and transparency will help all Albertans, and in the last three or four motions for returns the government's desire not to do that is very concerning, as highlighted by the press, as highlighted by other speakers. I will ask my colleagues to do the right thing and provide as much information to all Albertans as we can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other individuals who wish to speak to Motion for a Return 24 as moved by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Health I move to reject Motion for a Return 24. The motion asked to return a list of lawsuits in which Alberta Health Services was, as of March 31, 2011, named as a defendant, indicating the cause of action and the amount of damages claimed. Any lawsuits filed against AHS in the Alberta courts are generally matters of public record and could be sought by the opposition outside of the Assembly. Generating this list and a description of each lawsuit would require considerable resources that could better be used elsewhere to support our health system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Speaking to the amendment?

Mr. Cooper: There's no amendment, but I'll speak to the main question because they just rejected the question, which is what they regularly do, reject accountability, responsibility. It's not my words. It's the Privacy Commissioner's, the FOIP commissioner's, who I may have been paraphrasing. They are equally as strong. I will be happy to table a document, Mr. Speaker, an article from November 23, just last week. The headline reads this: Access to Information in Alberta Nearing 'Crisis Situation,' FOIP Commissioner Says.

We have very important business before the House that has to do with the liabilities that the government is responsible for in terms of the number of people that may or may not be seeking legal action against AHS, and there is one organization that has the ability to provide this information. Every single lawsuit isn't published. You can't google every single lawsuit. It is not possible to know every time the government is named in a lawsuit, so my colleague merely asks a question that would provide information to Albertans. What and how many lawsuits has the government been named in as a defendant? It doesn't ask for all of the details of everything to do with those lawsuits as some of that would likely not be admissible, but it asks for a list of lawsuits in which AHS was named as a defendant.

You know, Mr. Speaker, this is about the government knowing exactly what Alberta Health Services is up to, and while AHS being sued isn't always an indication of whether or not they've been doing a good job or a bad job, it can give some idea of the number of claims that are on the increase or decrease. It can give an idea of whether or not we are moving in the right direction. It can help us take the temperature of what Albertans are feeling. Instead, the government decides: no, we won't provide you any information.

Now, I know that the government two weeks ago passed an amendment to ask the question that they wanted to answer and then voted against the amendment that they had passed. That can be confusing. What they are choosing to do is to not provide information to Albertans. In not just AHS, but also in virtually every area of the government we see this.

As the FOIP commissioner has said, access to information is at a near "crisis situation." A quote from Ms Clayton: "What I do know is that Albertans are not receiving timely responses (or any response, in some cases) to their requests for access to information." Clayton wrote: "I am calling on this government, and public bodies in all sectors, to reverse the course we are on."

All that we're doing here is asking this government to act on the words of the FOIP commissioner and reverse the course that we're on. Mr. Speaker, I know that this afternoon we're going to see a number of situations, including around information with respect to Bill 6, which is now a year old and the consultations are yet to be completed, including some areas of the agriculture industry, education, and human services and some other things that the independent Member for Calgary-Elbow is interested in, a consistent pattern of doing exactly what the FOIP commissioner has said not to do; that's to provide no response at all, which is exactly what's happening to my hon. colleague. He's going to receive, in some cases, no information at all, just as the FOIP commissioner mentioned.

She went on to say, in that same article from just last week, "I do not believe I should have to order public bodies to comply with a clear obligation under the law." Mr. Speaker, agencies and departments of government have a requirement to provide information to Albertans.

This government is on a very disturbing trend of not providing any information, as we see in this question and as we saw in question 22. The government has determined that they don't want to reverse this dangerous course that we're on, that they don't want

to provide any information to this House, not just to public bodies but to the Legislative Assembly, the body that represents all Albertans.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, this is a very troubling trend. I know that I've spoken at length about it because it's something that I care a lot about. I care about the ability of Albertans to have access to information that is important to them. I care about Albertans having access to information that gives some indication of the work that AHS or other bodies are doing. I care about access to information around human services.

We had a case in the House just last week where the government said one thing and did another. They said that the Child and Youth Advocate had been getting updates when they hadn't. It is a major, major problem and a major obstacle that this government is going to face if they don't respect Albertans and their ability and need to have access to information.

We're not asking for the moon when we ask for a list of lawsuits where AHS is named. We're not asking for every detail around that lawsuit. We're merely asking for the ones where they're named as a defendant, the cause of the action, and the amount of damages claimed, not even who's asking the question or not even who's filing the lawsuit, but just the information that AHS is responsible for.

I know that the government has a track record of ducking and weaving around information that AHS has and what they should and should not be responsible for. Sometimes it's AHS's fault, and sometimes it's not. Here we have another case just like that.

Mr. Speaker, it's my hope that members of the backbenches, who are filling the vast majority of the Chamber today, would not reject this question but require the minister and, in turn, AHS to actually answer the question that is important to Albertans.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just thought I would stand up and engage in some of the conversation around privacy and what the government can and cannot do and what the government is doing in regard to this particular amendment and the issues around discussion about Alberta Health Services being able to have records provided to the opposition around their court cases.

My understanding when I look at the government of Alberta is that there are ministries within the government of Alberta that have the capacity to share information when it's public record. Justice would be considered one of those ministries that can disclose information when there is litigation in place. So if we're looking at Alberta Health Services and we're discussing whether or not there are potential lawsuits in place, that is public record. That is not under Health but, in fact, under Justice.

I would encourage the opposition, when we're talking about these things, to make sure that we're actually talking about them in what the capacity of the government is. The capacity of the government is, of course, to release information when requested through Justice about potential litigation. That can already be happening with the Alberta Health Services request, and as the minister correctly said, this request is only a matter of asking Justice to release the information around the litigation.

I would also like to caution the opposition that when we talk about the legislative officer in the context of privacy breaching and not providing FOIP requests when required, this request under this motion is not actually something that would have to be under a FOIP request. This would be something where you would just specifically go and look on the registry of Justice and see that there is potential

litigation. It is a matter of just researching what Alberta Health Services may or may not be involved with within the justice system.

Again, I would be looking at defeating this motion in the context of: this information is relevant, it is open to the public, and it can be done at any time if the opposition so chooses to request those records.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to Motion for a Return 24?

Seeing and hearing none, I would give the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat an opportunity to close debate.

Mr. Barnes: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two overwhelming thoughts I'm sitting here with. First of all, this is not about providing the information to the opposition; this is clearly about providing it to Albertans. The FOIP process can be expensive and cumbersome. Let's just make it so that they have direct connection to their system. After all, it's Albertans' system.

My other thought is almost scary. I'm sitting here thinking that if they can't provide basic information on lawsuits, the cause of action and the amount of damages claimed, my goodness, maybe it's because there are too many lawsuits. Maybe the people of Alberta are in huge financial jeopardy and risk with the amount of lawsuits. But, my goodness, how will we know? How will we know? The Alberta government is not willing to provide this in a clear and concise manner.

I wonder when Alberta Health Services – again, way past \$21 billion annually now, when we look at it. You know, there's a management principle, Mr. Speaker: if you can't measure it, you can't manage it. As I said earlier, here we are in a system where Albertans, I'm sure the vast, vast majority of them, at the end of the line, where a loved one, a family member, a community member, as maybe the system has failed them, has fallen through the cracks, not had the access that we know our good front-line workers can provide, have gone to, you know, the extent of a retainer and a lawsuit and all those things, and our own government – our own government – can't easily provide this information. My goodness, how are we going to run \$21 billion, over half of our revenues, over 40 per cent of our spending?

This transparency, this openness would allow Alberta Health Services and the Ministry of Health to do it better. Granted, okay, she's the minister. It's her prerogative to run the system her way, but I think there's a lot of trepidation, and there's a lot of, you know, peril ahead if you don't run it in an open and transparent way.

I will clearly say that the 2012 election was so different than the 2015 election. In 2012 at the doors Albertans wanted to be more involved in their government, wanted to be more open and more knowledgeable, more part of the process. Fewer Albertans falling through the cracks was a huge, huge concern. Maybe two years from now we'll be there again, and the government will feel the accountability of the voters.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all my colleagues that aren't the percentage that's part of cabinet to please make it so that Albertans can have access to this information – as my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills has pointed out, it's just the cause of action and the amount of damages claimed – so that Albertans clearly know where the system is broken, where we can make it better, and what the extent of our liability and responsibility is.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion for a Return 24 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:29 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Barnes	Fraser	Orr
Cooper	Gotfried	Rodney
Cyr	Hunter	Taylor
Drysdale		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Horne	Nielsen
Babcock	Jabbour	Payne
Carson	Jansen	Piquette
Ceci	Kazim	Renaud
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Littlewood	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Shepherd
Dach	Luff	Sigurdson
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Turner
Goehring	Miller	Westhead
Hinkley	Miranda	Woollard

Totals:	For – 10	Against – 39
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[Motion for a Return 24 lost]

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

Legal Aid and Self-represented Litigants

M25. Mr. Cyr moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any studies or briefing notes prepared for the government between January 1, 2012, and February 29, 2016, regarding legal aid or self-represented litigants in Alberta.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, when we start talking about legal aid, this is something that we need to consider as one of the most vulnerable parts of Alberta's entire population: people that can't afford to defend themselves. This is something that has repeatedly seen news saying that it's underfunded and has some real strain within the system. To hear that the government is going to be rejecting this motion for a return is very distressing for myself. I would argue that a lot of Albertans would agree with me when I say that these briefings that are being put forward by the Alberta government should be made public so that we can have an understanding of exactly what needs to be fixed within legal aid.

Now, I will read from a CBC article posted July 15, 2014. It was called Legal Aid Funding to be Probed by Auditor General. This is an Auditor General being asked by our current Premier for a review of the legal aid system. A quote that she's got in that article – I'll go word for word – is:

I know Legal Aid is doing the best that it can with the ridiculously meager resources it has at its disposal.

But ultimately the best decision is to properly fund Legal Aid and that's a decision our justice minister needs to make, and that's a decision he's choosing not to.

Now, at this point we have seen our Minister of Justice putting money into legal aid, and I will applaud that decision, that we need to actually reinforce – I know this is a contentious issue because, in the end, putting money right now into anything is a huge concern for all of our taxpayers when we're running this much of a deficit. We're running, I believe . . .

Mr. Ceci: A \$10.8 billion.

4:50

Mr. Cyr: Yes. Thank you, Minister of Finance. . . . a \$10.8 billion deficit.

Whenever we start to look at deficits this large, we do need to be making sure that every dollar we put forward is accounted for. That's why these briefings are so important, to find out how exactly it is that Alberta is spending its money. Are there efficiencies that we can find within the system? That actually is what I'm after. Is there something that we can go forward with?

Now, this is something that came up when I was working as an accountant. One concern that I would have is because my office would do low-income single parents' returns for free. What would happen is that we would get these low-income single parents coming into my office, and they would have some very distressing stories, and some of those were related to our legal system. Now, when it came to their situations, it was hard for them to move forward with their lives without resolving some of these concerns that they had.

I myself heard that the way legal aid works right now – and the government can correct me if I'm wrong – is that in order to apply for legal aid, you had to go several times before being accepted for it. That tells me that it may not be working the way that it's supposed to. It looks like what it's doing, from what I can see and through what my clients could see, was using that as a filter to avoid bringing people into the system. Whenever we've got something along that way saying, "Let's bring red tape into protecting our most vulnerable," that does seem to be a problem. That's why I'm saying that when it comes to these briefing notes, is this something that has been identified as a problem within the legal aid system, or are there some other problems that we're just not aware of?

Now, I do know that when it comes to legal aid, we're always looking to see how we can help people. That always seems to be the root of everything when it comes to legal aid. When we start looking at how we can help people, it's coming down to what studies we've done. I know I've been pounding on the government for economic impact studies. Well, this one here isn't an economic impact study. It's just a study that the government has already probably done on how the system is working – how the system is working – and on what needs to be improved and on who exactly is being impacted by the fact that we have people that may not be able to get legal aid.

Now, one thing that does trouble me – and it has been brought up by myself – is that when we do bring up the minimum wage, people working at minimum wage will no longer qualify for legal aid. This is a concern. If you're working for minimum wage, will you be able to continue moving forward? That's something that I believe would probably be in one of these briefs that we are asking for. It is amazing to see how one change the government can make will actually have an adverse impact on our most vulnerable. That is a concern that I have, that in the end we're not able to help people because we've set the bar too low, because the fact is that minimum wage is going up so rapidly.

We only find out this stuff after it's become a tragedy. We've seen this going through with the child advocate and the recent discovery with Serenity. We don't identify these problems until way too late, and then we start working on solutions way after the fact. This is the problem with the legal aid system. Are there systemic problems that need to be identified, and why are we not moving forward on this?

Now, many of you may not know this because this was something that we had done in our training session within the Legislature. Actually, legal aid was the very first question that I asked the

Minister of Justice about. This is something that I myself have a deep interest in, making sure that legal aid is actually functioning the way it's supposed to. If it means that maybe funds aren't the problem here, then what is the problem, and how can we get to it?

I hear frustration. I hear frustration from all the stakeholders that have been involved with legal aid. It goes from the lawyers to the prosecutors and the actual vulnerable that are using the system. I also know that a lot of people right now in my riding are really having troubles because of the fact that they were making large amounts of money before and with this downturn are making no money, and they don't qualify for this because of their past incomes.

Now, I'm not unilaterally saying that we need to go in and increase legal aid's funding at the risk of going the other way. But that's why these briefs are so important to be actually going through. Why is it that the government is choosing not to release something as simple as briefs that are prepared? This is something that we, as all Albertans, should know. Is our system working? I will make the argument that, in the end – from the beginning, which is January 1, 2012, all the way up to February 29, 2016, we may see a progression of how legal aid has changed in the last four years. That progression: what exactly is it that the Alberta government is doing? Is it getting better? Is it getting worse? We won't know because, again, we don't have any of these briefings.

I encourage the government and the minister to release this and become transparent when it comes to legal aid. These are people in need, especially right now in the hard times that we're having.

When it comes to my riding right now, unfortunately . . . [Mr. Cyr's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my hon. colleague the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General I stand today to respond to the motion for a return from the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any studies or briefing notes prepared for the government between January 1, 2012, and February 29, 2016, regarding legal aid or self-represented litigants in Alberta.

Unfortunately, the motion is too broad to be accepted. If the ministry were to provide copies of all briefing notes and studies regarding legal aid or self-represented litigants, it would be inadvertently releasing personal information, waiving legal privilege, and jeopardizing security measures at courthouses.

First, self-represented litigants often have unique and complex issues. As a result, specific issues in cases may be discussed at length within the ministry, and releasing the accompanying documents would publicize the litigants' name and legal complications.

Furthermore, it is a reality that vexatious litigants tend to be self-represented. Therefore, some briefings concerning self-represented litigants provide advice on whether or not to seek a vexatious litigant application. My hon. colleague tells me that publicizing these briefings would in effect disavow the importance of the solicitor-client privilege in our judicial system.

Lastly, some self-represented litigants are also vexatious litigants who have persistently engaged in inappropriate courtroom behaviour. Security considerations are also outlined in some briefings.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt; however, the time limit for consideration of this item of business today has concluded.

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Equalization Program

509. Mr. Jean moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to complete and make public a report by August 31, 2017, that evaluates the current equalization formula and outlines the improvements the government will seek on behalf of Albertans when the equalization program is next renegotiated.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to stand up and present to this Legislative Assembly my very first private member's motion. I did have an opportunity to pass a private member's bill in Ottawa, and I remember it was with extreme interest for myself and my colleagues to be able to do a first private member's bill. It's a practice that didn't start all that long ago but certainly has evolved and that I think can only get better as time goes.

5:00

This particular motion is a motion to urge Albertans and this Assembly to move in a certain direction, and that direction is towards declaring ourselves on a national issue, an issue that takes much of the wealth out of Alberta and returns it to Ottawa, and in return we get no service back to that same value.

Many of you may not realize that we do have the opportunity to speak our mind on the national stage in relation to how our money is spent. Our Constitution is not very clear in relation to the formula itself, and there is an opportunity, therefore, to express ourselves, much like Quebec did in the last go-round. Every 10 years or so, depending on what is decided between the provinces and the federal government, there is the opportunity to discuss the renegotiation going forward. In this case we've got 2019, the next time the equalization will be changed, and we're just asking that the Legislative Assembly take seriously this motion and put forward an argument or a position of where Alberta is.

You've all heard me talk a lot about that this year. You know, I think the reason why I talk about it so much is because when I go from constituency to constituency, I hear Albertans clearly tell me that equalization is important to them. They think that since we sent somewhere between \$22 billion and \$28 billion a year between 2007 and 2014 to the federal Parliament, to the federal government, which we didn't get back by way of services, that gives us a pretty good position to negotiate from, especially when you consider that Quebec receives about \$10 billion a year for equalization and Quebec has some services much less expensive than ours. In particular, I'm not sure if many of the members across the way know this, but in Quebec you actually have an opportunity to receive tuition as a student for almost half the price that it would cost an Alberta student. That means that somebody is subsidizing that or paying that amount, and in part it is Alberta.

Right now we have what I would consider to be one of the biggest downturns in Alberta's history as far as I've been alive, and it really concerns me. It concerns me especially when you consider that we have over a \$10 billion deficit, and this government hasn't curbed its spending whatsoever, in fact increased it, not looked for any efficiencies in government at all. There is a tremendous opportunity, then, to move the other way, which is to say that compared to the rest of the country, we need to be treated the same.

Now, I know that to date the Finance minister and the NDP government have said that they are agnostic to equalization, but for

Albertans I think it's an issue they care deeply about, and I would suggest that the minister take that into consideration. For any members, as I've said, that have travelled across the province in their constituency, whether it be in rural or urban Alberta, Albertans make it clear that they want to renegotiate the deal on equalization and get a better deal for Albertans, especially at this time.

I believe that's especially true because Albertans as a whole work hard. They pay taxes, they support their family, and right now they have a family member or a friend for sure that's unemployed. They're saying to themselves: why can't I get employment insurance? In Quebec 58 per cent of the people that apply for employment insurance are covered. In Alberta it's less than 40 per cent. In many of the maritime provinces it's over 90 per cent; if you apply, you get covered. You know, there are a lot of Albertans right now that are not just unemployed and their employment insurance has run out, but they weren't on employment insurance because they were private contractors and, therefore, weren't eligible for employment insurance.

While the Montreal mayor has been actively campaigning against our pipelines, the province of Quebec continues to enjoy many payouts as a direct result of the taxes generated here. This wealth is generated largely as a result of our petroleum industry, our oil and gas industry, our energy industry. They're being disingenuous when they won't exploit their own natural resources in the north, yet they're prepared to take the money from us, our hard-working Albertans who pay their taxes, pay their employment insurance benefits, send it to Ottawa but don't get services back in return.

As many of you know, many of these people, the men and women that work in the oil sands and elsewhere around Alberta, do pay taxes in other provinces. It's definitely something to consider. I do believe that Albertans are deeply compassionate and very interested in helping the rest of Canada when times are tough, but we need to follow through and put our best position forward, especially considering that the federal government right now is spending a lot of money on a lot of projects, and that money comes from Alberta at a time when we simply don't have it.

We're going to continue to pay, my understanding is, equalization payments even while we're in this deficit, even while we have over a hundred thousand Albertans that are unemployed. You know, some people think that it's just numbers, but somebody has to pay it back. By the time this government is finished, at the trend they're going, it will be the people of Alberta that pay back over \$2 billion a year in interest payments. Two billion dollars a year in interest payments: that's \$2,000 a household just to pay the interest at the current rates.

So it's not a laughing matter, and I think that what we need to do is make sure that during this period of time we find as many efficiencies as possible but also put our best foot forward to the federal government in negotiating what I think could be a tremendous opportunity for this entire Legislative Assembly. I truly think we could move forward with an opportunity to work together and to create an environment where Ottawa would actually take notice.

Last year at this time at our AGM our members passed a resolution to ask for us to do this. In February our caucus convened an advisory committee of three economists from across Canada: one from Alberta, one from Ontario, and one from eastern Canada. They came up with that amount, and the study is online if you want to see it. It does actually indicate that between 2007 and 2014 Alberta did send about \$190 billion to Ottawa that we didn't get back in any form of service. That's an average of over \$20 billion a year, and it's more than 10 times the value of our heritage savings trust fund. Primarily, that money appeared as a result of our exploiting our natural resources. That's \$6,000 more per person per year than we

send to Ottawa through things like taxes, CPP deductions, EI premiums, and they don't come back to Alberta by way of programs or infrastructure.

The fact is that whether it's pipeline approvals or infrastructure investments or CPP benefits that even reflect what we get for seniors in Alberta, it doesn't seem like we are getting our fair share, and we're still paying. We've never seen, I believe, more people out of work in this province than are out of work right now. I really do implore this government to negotiate and negotiate hard, to bring together a committee of like-minded MLAs that could put forward a good argument. I would suggest that there's never been a more important time.

5:10

It is designed for the opportunity for all Canadians to benefit in our natural resources indirectly, and I think that's contrary to the Constitution. Notwithstanding, there is a clause within the Constitution that defines the amount we pay based upon the room for taxation, or the fiscal capacity. That doesn't mean overtax us any more than you already have done, but it does mean that the formula itself fails to acknowledge what the recipient provinces are providing by way of either hydro rates or subsidization for babysitting, and it doesn't take into consideration the fact that there are higher costs in Alberta as a result of sometimes a boom. That's gone now, but it means that costs are higher here for the things that we need such as babysitting or other services that we as parents or homeowners or businesses have to pay. In Quebec we have a situation where the electricity bills are subsidized. I think it's wrong. Even in Manitoba the same thing exists.

In essence, that's not considered in any equalization calculation; it is exempted. Our oil and gas, our oil sands are not exempted, and once we burn it, it's gone. So there's certainly a situation there that we believe is unfair. Even over the entire country other experts have stepped forward and suggested that the equalization formula needs to be renegotiated, and other provinces have as well, including Saskatchewan, who is right next door to us. There is also an opportunity to reach out to Saskatchewan and talk to their minister, talk about that we as two provinces have a lot in common, more in common than most jurisdictions, that we could work together and try to improve our position with the federal government. We can't afford the status quo any longer because we're not going to be in the same situation that we were in just a number of years ago for a long time.

This would be an opportunity, I know, to reach out to other caucuses or to other governments right across the provinces. We have even opposition parties in Ontario and other parts of eastern Canada that are interested in a fairer deal. We do have an opportunity to build not just strategic partnerships on legislation that might be to our advantage in negotiating with the federal government but also, as like-minded people across our country, in bringing in legislation that will help the people. We've seen, for instance, that Saskatchewan has a much better issue of wait times in the health care system than does Alberta, and there are some opportunities there to adopt that model instead of continuing to pour money into the existing model.

As I mentioned before, I think it's important as well because we can truly expect that Quebec will probably bring forward a position paper this time as well since they did last time, and I think it's incumbent upon us to represent the people of Alberta and put forward a good argument on how to reduce equalization payments from Alberta and all of those other payments that we need to worry about. I truly believe that when we send tens of billions of dollars to Ottawa that we don't get back in services and other provinces

receive that money instead, I don't think it's fair when we have people living on the streets.

I went to Grande Cache just a few weeks ago, and there I met a gentleman and his wife that had to live in their vehicle. I don't know why we have people living on our streets and living in their cars who would rather live in houses when we're still sending billions of dollars to Ottawa. I'd rather see them employed and living in an apartment or a house and building up their life.

Truly, by supporting this motion, you could reach out to your constituents and show them that you're actually working for them and interested in keeping more dollars in Alberta. You talk about that as a government in relation to upgrading and refining capacity. Why not just straight cash and income tax and CPP benefits and EI benefits that go one way and don't come back the other?

This is an opportunity, in conclusion, for all parties to come together and say, "We in Alberta right now need your help, Ottawa," because we do. I know that you stay a lot in downtown Edmonton, but if you get out to Calgary and see the 40 per cent vacancy in residential, the 25-plus per cent vacancy in commercial in towns like Hanna or Grande Cache, Parkland county, where people are very worried, this would be a good signal to them.

I would encourage this government to come forward and support this motion. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise in the House today to talk about how our government stands up for Alberta's interests and actually gets things done. The folks on the other side of the House are all about talking and tweeting, but when it comes to actually getting things done for this province, they get nowhere.

Today the topic is equalization – and I'll get to that in a moment – but I do think it's curious that the Leader of the Official Opposition wants to raise an issue on which he was virtually silent when he was in Ottawa. For nearly a decade, Mr. Speaker, he represented Alberta in Parliament and sat in a desk behind the Prime Minister from Calgary. What happened on equalization?

An Hon. Member: Nothing.

Mr. Ceci: Absolutely nothing.

The Leader of the Opposition could be forgiven if he was out there fighting the good fight every day, but he wasn't. In his decade in Ottawa with the Prime Minister from Calgary he mentioned equalization once in the House and twice in committees. He sat on the Finance Committee for nearly a thousand days, and he mentioned equalization a single time. Not much of a record. The success of the former Conservative government on moving forward on their hobby horse is equal to their success in getting pipelines built to increase international markets at tidewater. You would think that after all that time and all that talk and so little success, they would have even an ounce of humility, but instead they puff up their chests and they let the rhetoric fly like the last decade didn't even happen.

Let's talk about our record. Our government is focused on working with the federal government and other provincial partners to get results that help Albertans right now. Our government signed an agreement with the federal government to make \$1.08 billion in funding for infrastructure available through the federal public transit infrastructure fund and the clean water and waste-water fund. That means getting roads, bridges, transit, and other infrastructure projects built to create jobs now. We are working with other provinces to get a new agreement on health care funding, Mr.

Speaker. We are working with the federal government for approval on much-needed pipelines so we can get Alberta's oil to market.

People on the other side are very excited about the possibilities of getting the Keystone XL project built now. They are ready to hang a mission-accomplished banner along the border, believing the work is done now. If it gets built, it will be helpful, but it does not solve the biggest problem that our industry has. It does not stop the fact that we are selling our product at a discount every time we ship out a barrel of oil. We need those pipelines built in Canada, and from coast to coast we need those pipelines built so that oil flows to China and other markets and we get full value for our product. If pipelines to offshore markets get built, it also means we have some leverage with our American customers. We also have to recognize that there is a huge risk of unintended consequences if we open up the issue of federal transfers to the provinces.

5:20

Equalization is a comparatively small part of the federal transfers. It's a comparatively small part. In the 2016-17 budget the federal government sent just over \$49.4 billion to the provinces through the Canadian health transfer and the Canadian social transfer. The federal government is paying out nearly \$7.3 billion of those transfers to our province to help pay for health care and other services Alberta families need. By contrast, less than \$18 billion is available through equalization. The per capita system for these transfers helps Alberta. If we begin an argument for significant change to equalization, it opens the door to a broader conversation that could be very, very bad for Alberta.

Any good strategy that deals with transfers needs to consider all of the pots of funding, not just one. That's why my colleague the Minister of Health is fighting hard for better funding for health. That's what is in Alberta's interests, not engaging in the hack-and-slash approach to health care that the Leader of the Opposition is pushing for now.

As for the report released by the opposition, it's little more than a bashing exercise to other provinces. Think about that for a second. In 2019 we are going to enter into complicated multilateral negotiations, and the Official Opposition's plan, if you can call it that, is to poke any potential allies in the eye even before those talks begin. That gives you a little insight as to why the Conservatives have failed so miserably in getting anything meaningful done for this province.

We believe in fighting for Albertans' interests, but we believe in doing so in a way that is based on results and not just headlines. We will get our share of the federal infrastructure funding. We will work with the federal government to get pipelines built to improve access to markets. We will continue to fight for new funding agreements for health care. When the time comes – when the time comes – we will make sure Alberta gets its share of transfers. We'll do so in working together respectfully and collaboratively and like adults. But we refuse to cherry-pick and pick one issue in isolation without looking at all the other issues that are at stake. Looking out for Alberta's interests means working with our partners and toning down the rhetoric. We refuse to engage in the opposition tactics, Mr. Speaker, which are loud, misguided, and an unqualified failure.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on this motion about equalization payments, and I note with interest that the member opposite, the Minister of Finance, presided over a period of time in Calgary where the increase in taxes was almost double the rate of inflation. It's interesting to see that he's found a way to become so prudent in his spending.

But let's get to some more details about the issue at hand. What we should be talking about here is the entire system of transfer payments from the federal government to the provinces and territories rather than just the equalization payments in isolation. That gives us a more fulsome picture of the topic at hand. As you may already know, the government of Canada's transfer payments to the provinces include the Canada health transfer, the Canada social transfer, and the equalization payments. The Canada health transfer is provided to all provinces on a per capita basis to support access to public health care. The Canada social transfer is also provided to all provinces, again on a per capita basis, to support core social and education programs. By contrast, only six of Canada's provinces receive equalization payments: P.E.I., Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, we know that those numbers are large and largely on the backs of Albertans in many cases.

In order to have a fruitful discussion, though, about the equalization component of transfer payments, it's important to understand what equalization payments are. From the letters and comments my caucus colleagues and I have received, we see that there's a lot of misinformation out there being spread, unintentionally or otherwise, about equalization payments. That is really of no value to the conversation for Albertans in benefit of what we need to do in the future.

Every Canadian income and sales tax payer in every province contributes to the funds used by the federal government to make transfer payments; hence every taxpayer contributes to the equalization portion of transfer payments. Provinces with more residents or whose residents are more economically productive – that was an Alberta we once knew – will generate more taxes to the federal government. The provincial governments themselves do not give money to the federal government for transfer payments or equalization payments. There is no cheque.

Equalization payments are intended to ensure that each province has enough fiscal capacity to deliver core government services. Equalization payments are provided to provinces whose per capita gross domestic product is less than the national average per capita GDP. Equalization especially benefits those provinces that have relatively weak tax bases due to small industrial or consumer bases or small natural resource endowments, which, of course, shows that we have broadly spread resources but that they're not always within the geographical areas of all of the provinces within Confederation.

To clarify the misconceptions of some Albertans who have been misinformed about how the transfer payments work, the Alberta government transfers exactly zero dollars – again, no cheque – each year to the federal government for transfer and equalization payments. The funding for federal equalization payments comes only from individual Canadians and businesses by federal personal and corporate income taxes, the goods and services tax, customs duties, and other sources of money for federal general revenues. A high-earning individual in Quebec will pay more tax dollars towards equalization payments than a low-earning individual in Alberta, so it is indeed a federal program meant to benefit across the board in Confederation.

Out of the federal government's \$71 billion in total transfer payments in 2017, Alberta will receive \$5.79 billion, or \$1,364 per Albertan, in transfer payments under the Canada Health Act transfer, \$4.226 billion to deliver health care in this province, and the Canada social transfer is \$1.546 billion for postsecondary education, social assistance, social services, early childhood development, and early learning and child care. Those transfer payments can only be used for the purposes specified. Again, the money for transfer payments and equalization payments comes from individual taxpayers, not provincial budgets.

Mr. Speaker, what is Alberta's role in Confederation, this country we all love, the one that we are all patriotic about while also being passionate about our own province and our own cities within Alberta? As we take a closer look at which provinces receive equalization payments, let's remember that Alberta's role in Confederation was not always as an economic powerhouse. It isn't today either, but that's another story. It's important to regularly update how we calculate transfer payments because the provinces in our great country are always changing and, with that, of course, going through challenges.

For the last 50 years Alberta is the only province not to receive money from the equalization program.

An Hon. Member: Say that again.

Mr. Gotfried: It's 50, 44, some kind of a number in there that's kind of interesting.

Despite a projected 2.9 per cent, or \$9.5 billion, decline in GDP Alberta's \$317 billion contribution to Canada's trillion-dollar economy will still be close to 16 per cent.

As a comparison, Alberta's GDP has been approximately \$80,000 per person each year while Quebec's GDP has been around \$45,000 per person each year. Again, that was the Alberta advantage we once knew. The amount of taxes collectable by the two provincial governments will continue to favour Alberta until Quebec's economy catches up to the national average at around \$55,000 GDP per person per year or until Alberta's economy, unfortunately, declines to the national average, that race to the bottom that I think we've heard from some of our members here. Alberta's GDP would have to fall by approximately one-third in order for Albertans to stop being net contributors to equalization. I personally am hopeful that we actually won't get there.

A province's fiscal capacity is determined by their ability to collect personal income taxes, business income taxes, consumption taxes, property taxes, and natural resource revenues and is currently used to determine how much a province may receive in equalization payments from the federal government. Under the current formula unique large-scale revenue sources such as electrical generation are not captured by the definition of fiscal capacity. That needs to be captured. Consequently, provinces like Quebec, Ontario, and Manitoba receive more in equalization payments than if those resources were counted like Alberta's energy resources. That's something we need to do going forward, Mr. Speaker, to compare renewables and nonrenewables in the same calculations and in the same way. Those are value and those are resources that we hold within our provinces and as part of Confederation.

5:30

According to the province of Quebec's most recent budget the way that the federal government treats revenues from Hydro-Québec is a point of contention with the federal government. They expect to receive approximately \$2.7 billion in revenues from Hydro-Québec on incomes of \$78.6 billion. By comparison, with an almost fully developed energy industry Alberta received an estimated \$2.7 billion in natural resource royalties in 2015-2016, \$1.5 billion in bitumen and \$1.2 in natural gas and other.

Meanwhile some provinces continue to block efforts to increase the national economic benefits of fully developing and diversifying our potential energy exports without recognizing changes in the provinces' natural resource exploitation since the last major change to transfer payments, back as late as 2004. We must think seriously about what it means to have financial and economic models that position some of our natural energy resources but not others as

expected drivers of sustainable economic and social growth and the wealth that we enjoy thereby.

Mr. Speaker, we need to help Alberta help Canada. That's really what we're about in this Legislature. We can continue to be one of those economic engines, and we can contribute more than our fair share sometimes, but – you know what? – we need to do it in a respectful way that balances the resources and revenues and income of these other provinces and compares like with like. As we approach scheduled renegotiations of transfer payments in 2019, Alberta needs to ask our fellow partners in Confederation to help us help Canada. If Canada's provinces and territories want to enjoy the financial benefits of Alberta's natural resources, we must all clear the way for Alberta's exports to flow freely and responsibly to markets where they are demanded.

Mr. Speaker, it reminds me of I think it was 2012-2013, when 80 per cent of the new jobs in Canada were created here in Alberta. We were supporting the graduates, the youth, the workers that were being displaced by other industries across this country, and we need to put our stake back in the sand and re-create that Alberta advantage that we've lost, because we don't mind supporting this great country. You know, Albertans are proud to contribute to Canada's strength and prosperity through the jobs and resources that tens of thousands of individuals have helped our province develop and share, that risk capital that I talked about earlier today.

Now Albertans are asking other provincial leaders to support Alberta's role in Canada's transition to a more diverse economy that builds and sustains long-term investor confidence – those two words again – all-important not only to the future of Alberta but to the future of Canada. Alberta can fulfill its responsibilities as a key member and contributor of Confederation by being thoughtful in its approach to renegotiating transfer payments in 2019, possibly with some new leadership in this great province. In addition to strengthening Canada's economy through internal trade, opening pipelines from Canada to the east and to the south will reduce our dependence.

Mr. Speaker, thank you. We need to be responsible . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and speak about the motion introduced by the Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin regarding equalization. One would hope that having spent 10 years in the House of Commons as a Member of Parliament, one would have learned something about bringing people together rather than creating division amongst the Canadian population. Pitting Canadian against Canadian, Albertan against Albertan seems to be true to form for the Leader of the Official Opposition.

But I think one little detail kind of explains this a little bit, and it's his pronunciation of the name of our second-largest province, which is a bit of a pet peeve for me. I'm thinking that after 10 years in the House of Commons he'd learn to pronounce the name of our second-largest province in either one of our official languages. Quebec is English; Québec is French. Q-bec: I have no idea what language that is.

What I'd like to do, though, is insist that we do things in this province that minimize the divisions in this country, that don't pit Canadians against Canadians, that don't lash out against other parts of the country.

I'm very proud to stand up to speak to this motion, Mr. Speaker, because it actually allows me to talk about what our government is doing to promote the interests of Albertans. The members on this

side of the House are getting things done while members on the other side would rather keep their talking points to rhetoric.

After almost 10 years representing Albertans, there was zero movement on equalization from the Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin. He served under a Prime Minister, sat behind him yet virtually was silent on equalization. The Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin was not lobbying his colleagues and the Prime Minister to do anything. During his time working with the former Prime Minister, as was mentioned, he mentioned equalization once in the House and only twice in committee. During his time on the Finance Committee, a committee on which the Leader of the Official Opposition sat for a thousand days, the member only said the word “equalization” once, yet he stands today in this House and pits Canadians against each other, pits Albertans against each other, following his true-to-form – true-to-form – analysis in trying to tell us that equalization is something that is damaging to us as Canadians. Well, in fact, it’s a design that is one of the underpinnings of our Confederation. After 10 years of virtual silence, no matter how you look at it, it’s a bad record that the Leader of the Official Opposition demonstrates when he talks about equalization today. Nothing was said before.

Let’s, Mr. Speaker, now talk about the current government’s record. The government has shown its commitment to Albertans. Our government and the federal government signed an agreement to make \$1.09 billion in funding for infrastructure available through the federal public transit infrastructure fund and the clean water and waste-water fund. Given these and other infrastructure projects – these investments will stimulate job growth. Our government recognizes that job creation is crucial during these times, so our government is doing what it can to ensure that Albertans remain employed, with good-paying jobs. We also recognize the importance of our public health care system. We heard from Albertans on this issue. This is why our government is consulting with other provinces to get a new agreement on health care funding. Our government is also working with the federal government for approval on much-needed pipelines so we can increase market access for Alberta’s oil.

Mr. Speaker, I must speak against the motion before the House today. The fact is that there is a real risk in opening up discussion on equalization at this time. Be careful what you wish for. As the Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin is aware, equalization represents a small portion of our federal transfers. To discuss equalization would signify discussion on all federal transfers, which could create many unintended consequences. In 2016-17 the federal government will be providing Alberta with \$7.3 billion through the Canadian health transfer and the Canadian social transfer. Of the \$49.4 billion sent to all provinces, Alberta is receiving nearly 15 per cent of all transfers. These funds are helping to pay for the health care and other services Alberta families and communities rely on, yet the Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin wants to maybe put those at risk by opening up equalization negotiations at this time. On the other hand, less than \$18 billion is made available for provinces through equalization. I cannot support this motion because if we start restructuring equalization today, it may open up wider discussions that could negatively impact Albertans.

We need a holistic view on the whole issue, and I do not believe the Leader of the Official Opposition has used this perspective on equalization. He simply looks for ways to divide Canadians and Albertans unnecessarily. Our government will not put the services Albertans rely on at risk, and I’m proud to be part of a government that is proactively engaging with federal and provincial partners for Albertans rather than undermining our health care system by cutting funding, as the Leader of the Opposition is pushing for.

Almost one month ago the opposition released its report on equalization, which proved to be an exercise in criticizing our provincial partners. Given that we are entering multilateral negotiations on various issues in 2019, including equalization, the Official Opposition is asking for the Alberta government to start infighting with potential allies. Once again: division, division, division. Let’s do something that joins people together and has a positive effect. I’m proud that our government is not aligning itself with the rhetoric used by the members opposite given that this would only weaken our government’s position, which would adversely affect Albertans.

5:40

On this side of the House we’re committed to standing up for Alberta’s interests. This is why we’re standing up for Alberta’s health care system as the Minister of Health continues to work on a new funding formula. This is why our government has signed agreements for the federal infrastructure funding and in the process is improving the services that Albertans use while ensuring they remain employed. This is why our government works with the federal government to ensure that oil has access to new markets.

This is why our government will collaborate with its federal and provincial partners to ensure that Alberta receives its fair share of transfers. These negotiations will be based on pragmatic and forward-thinking solutions, not on the rhetoric of the Official Opposition, and they will be in a spirit of bringing people together rather than dividing them and looking for solutions that have a positive effect for both Albertans and Canadians as we move forward in ensuring that the equalization that is negotiated in the future is one that continues to join us together and benefits both Albertans and Canadians right across the country.

Thank you.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I’m really disappointed that government members forgot who elected them, who they have to represent, but the Official Opposition and all the opposition here are actually representing Albertans because they know that they were elected by Albertans. We are on the side of Albertans.

I am proud to rise to support the Leader of the Official Opposition’s Motion 509, calling on the government to make Alberta’s position public by next summer so we can begin a national conversation. This reasonable motion before us today gives everyone in this House the opportunity to tell their constituents about this danger and do something to help Alberta get a better deal from Ottawa. The aim of equalization payments is to ensure that reasonably comparable levels of services are available at similar taxation levels and, second, that the commitment is only to the principle of achieving reasonable comparability. In 2014 over \$28 billion was extracted from Alberta taxpayers and sent to Ottawa, never to return. How are we supposed to grow and develop Alberta if we force Albertans to make a net contribution to Ottawa that is bigger than the entire budget for the national defence of the Canadian federation? It’s not right.

It is not just we politicians who have been saying that we need a better deal on equalization. Academics, economists, and ordinary Albertans all realize that equalization isn’t working for Canada, whether we are a have or a have-not. This is why the Wildrose turned to the experts and the think tanks to help understand equalization better and figure out what we need to do. Yes, the Wildrose sought help from Dr. Marco Navarro-Génie at the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies out of Halifax.

Halifax is surrounded by four chronic net-recipient provinces of equalization: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec. Some say that equalization allows those provinces to

not reform their public services to get better value for money. That is recommendation 3 from our report,

that equalization be made conditional on steps being taken by recipient provinces with relatively high program delivery costs to reduce costs so that the per capita costs of providing programming in the recipient provinces would not exceed the national average.

Equalization also creates disincentives for recipient provinces to grow their economy for fear of going off the equalization payments. We see that in Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick they do not want to develop their resource industry out of unfounded environmental fears, fears that we have dealt with in Alberta for 50 years. But Quebec can sure offer substantially lower tuition fee rates at public universities and colleges than other provinces, and the students will misbehave and riot and bang pots and pans together to protect that low price. They will also protest Energy East and fracking without realizing that it's Albertans, many working in the energy sector, that are paying for their cheap tuition.

Besides the equalization program, there are other cash transfer programs from Ottawa that put Alberta at a disadvantage – we call these stealth equalization – programs like employment insurance. If you fish for a living on the east coast, after two days on a boat you can qualify for employment insurance. Fishermen's employment insurance is income based, not based on the number of days worked. These self-employed people are no different than farmers and ranchers. I don't see farmers' employment insurance based on the income they made; in fact, they, like all the other self-employed folks in Alberta, aren't eligible at all. It was Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau that set this scheme up for fishers in the 1970s with the support of his Maritimes lieutenant, Allan J. MacEachen. It was a bad scheme then, and it's a bad scheme now.

Maritimers and Newfoundlanders – and I should know; I have one working for me – joke about going on lotto 10/42: work 10 weeks, and get employment insurance for 42 weeks. Wow. What a great disincentive on the search for work, job creation, and innovation. Who would want to do anything when all you have to do is work for 10 weeks and get pogy for 42 weeks? Then you can spend your time going for coffee, driving a quad or snowmobile on the trails, or working under the table in the black market. Maritimers and Newfoundlanders will complain that their industries are seasonal. That's right. Some probably are, but what about the rest of the year?

Alberta farmers and ranchers have a seasonal industry, too. So does oil and gas. Did you ever hear of a spring breakup? Some people will complain about all the people that will have to move away from their communities to find work. Well, I promise they won't have to move as far away as I did. That's just life sometimes, Mr. Speaker, especially when your government isn't generating an investment-friendly economic environment. People all over the world move all the time to find work. Look at all the economic immigrants like myself. We didn't choose easy street. Why do small communities out east get to live on easy street on the backs of Alberta taxpayers? It's a wealth transfer, pure and simple.

Here we have oil and gas workers out of work, and their EI has run out. What are they going to do? Our guys out here can't work anywhere for 10 weeks and then get 42 weeks of employment insurance. Of course, they can't rotate in and out of a rig for 10 weeks each and collect from the government for the rest of the year. That would be wrong and a terrible disincentive. Instead, if they can't find any work, they'll have to turn to the Minister of Human Services and demand income support. It's not fair, Mr. Speaker.

Our recommendation 5 reads, "That substantial reforms to the Employment Insurance (EI) Program be made to [ensure that it treats] similarly situated Canadians with more parity." Alberta paid

over \$3.3 billion into EI in 2013 and received only \$1.4 billion in benefits. That includes maternity leave. That means that almost \$2 billion was transferred out of Alberta to pay for EI in places like Atlantic Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the case for reforms is clear, and negotiations will get nowhere if we wait. We need to educate Albertans and Canadians on the facts. So I rise today to add my voice to that of the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin and call on the government to evaluate the current equalization formula and outline the improvements they will see on behalf of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I ask all members of this House to support this private member's motion. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for proposing this motion. You know, our government is working collaboratively with our federal and provincial partners. We're also working hard to create made-in-Alberta solutions to the situations that Alberta is facing. And while I agree that Alberta has a role to play when equalization is next renegotiated, I'm quite concerned that the Leader of the Official Opposition has a profound misunderstanding of how equalization payments actually work.

5:50

He would rather drag other provinces through the mud, provinces whose co-operation we are seeking to work towards approval for a pipeline to tidewater. You see, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition has been encouraging Albertans to stop equalization payments, but that is so preposterous. I have to state that again. The Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin, the Leader of the Official Opposition, is encouraging Alberta to stop equalization payments. Does anyone want to take a guess how much Alberta has paid in equalization payments to other provinces?

Some Hon. Members: Zero.

Mr. Westhead: You're right. It's zero, Mr. Speaker. We have paid nothing to other provinces. It's the federal government that makes payments to other provinces, not Alberta. The motion proposed by the opposition leader leads me to believe that he would rather have Ottawa impose a solution for us. Alberta is facing difficult economic circumstances due to the low price of oil. We have a challenge ahead of us, and there's no doubt about that.

I can tell you that our government is working hard to address the situations Alberta faces. We're putting more money in Albertans' pockets by raising the minimum wage. We're putting Albertans back to work through our \$35 billion infrastructure plan, a plan that, I might add, the Leader of the Official Opposition wants to cut billions of dollars from and risk thousands of jobs. We are investing in our children's education by hiring teachers and support workers, but the opposition wants to cut those jobs, too. We are ensuring stability in our health care system, saving millions by working with Alberta's doctors to slow the rate of growth and ensure we have a sustainable public health system, but the Official Opposition wants to cut billions from health care, putting front-line services at risk.

Mr. Speaker, is the Leader of the Official Opposition asking Ottawa to solve our problems for us? Albertans are enterprising and resilient people, and I will always stand up for Alberta. I know that we have an important voice to add when the equalization formula comes up for renewal.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition owes Albertans an explanation why he sat as an MP for 10 years and failed to speak up for Alberta's interests. Of all the topics the

opposition leader could have chosen, he picked something that we have no control over. He says that he stands up for the energy sector, so why didn't he propose a motion on that? I know why. After he resigned from federal politics, he actually said that the rate of growth in the oil sands is too fast, that it should be slowed down. Shame. [interjections] That's right. I will table the document tomorrow showing that the Leader of the Official Opposition was opposed to the growth of the oil sands. I can't believe it. That's not how we feel on this side of the House. All I know for sure is that this government stands up for Albertans, and we have shown that through our actions. The opposition, on the other hand, would rather look to Ottawa and argue that the oil sands shouldn't be allowed to grow. That's not what I call standing up for Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition leader clearly doesn't understand how equalization works. In his opening comments he confirmed that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member, it's with some hesitancy that I want to interrupt such a fruitful and constructive discussion as exists here today. I interrupt.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to provide up to five minutes on the motion.

Mr. Jean: You know, Mr. Speaker, the last member was right. I did ask and suggest that we should slow down the oil sands in Fort McMurray, in that area. I have to tell you why, though. You see, we were sending so much money to Ottawa that we had no money for infrastructure for the people of Alberta, and that's what they forget. They forgot that I don't work for the people of Ottawa, and I don't work for the people of Manitoba or Newfoundland or British Columbia. I don't work for the people of the Northwest Territories or the Yukon, and I love those places like I love all of Canada. I love the people of Alberta more, and that's why I work for them.

When we're sending \$22 billion to \$28 billion a year more in money through our income taxes and EI and all of our CPP payments – and, yes; it's me. You know what? You pay it, too. Yes, you do. You pay all those payments, too. They go to Ottawa, and they don't come back to us in any way of a service. That's what happens. You're right. It's not a cheque that we sign to other provinces. It's actually cheques that all of us pay to Ottawa in taxes that we don't get back in any way, shape, or form in services. That's why I'm working for the people of Alberta, and I'm saying to them that I'm prepared to, since – what the heck – the contract comes up every 10 years for renegotiation, stand up and say: let's renegotiate; let's speak for the people of Alberta.

Do you have any idea how many people aren't covered by employment insurance right now? Here in Alberta there are thousands of people that aren't covered by employment insurance. That's because for years and years we've paid into employment insurance far more than we ever get back, and we only get about 38 per cent of our people that apply that get covered but in Atlantic Canada almost 100 per cent; in Quebec, more than 58 per cent. [interjections]

The Speaker: Government members, members, could we have some silence so I could hear his final, closing arguments, please.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry I feel passionate about it, but this contract opens every 10 years. So we have an opportunity right now to sit down with Ottawa and say: what can we do differently to make it more fair since right now we're not in the same situation we were in a couple of years ago? You may not have noticed because you're still spending money the same way, but I've noticed because I see thousands and thousands, tens of thousands of Albertans out of work, and I'm worried. So I'm saying: if we can, if you're not prepared to look over in the expense

column, please look out over on the other column, where the money that comes from all Albertans goes to Ottawa and doesn't come back. It's a net number. It's not a gross number. It's a net number. It's a big number, and that number is going to continue for the next couple of years because you guys aren't prepared to do anything about it.

They subsidized hydro rates. We know that for sure. Our baby-sitting costs here in Alberta, daycare, are 550 per cent greater than the average cost in Quebec. All this member can do in his speech is make fun of my pronunciation of Quebec. I've never heard my name used so much, my title. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Have you heard my name used so much in any particular 10-minute segment? They must be worried because when you don't have anything of substance to say and you're concerned and worried, you throw dirt. That seems to be all they can do, throw dirt, while the Wildrose Party on this side of the House is standing up for Albertans and saying: how about we renegotiate a contract that comes up every 10 years and make it better since the province that receives the most money out of that program – they put forward a position paper. What's wrong with us, since we're paying it? It seems fair.

Mr. Speaker, what I'd like to do is first of all implore them to reconsider because I would like to see some of them re-elected in the next election, not a lot. Only a couple need to stand up.

But I would ask for unanimous consent to move to one-minute bells.

[Unanimous consent granted]

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 509 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:59 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Panda
Barnes	Jean	Rodney
Clark	Loewen	Schneider
Cooper	MacIntyre	Smith
Cyr	McIver	Stier
Fraser	Nixon	Taylor
Hanson	Orr	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Horne	Miranda
Babcock	Jabbour	Nielsen
Carson	Jansen	Payne
Ceci	Kazim	Piquette
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Drever	Mason	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Goehring	McKittrick	Westhead
Hinkley	Miller	Woollard
Hoffman		

Totals: For – 20 Against – 40

[Motion Other than Government Motion 509 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:05 p.m.]

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