



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 22, 2017

Day 12

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)	Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
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Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)	Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
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Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader	Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
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Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
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Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	

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.

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

If everyone would just bow their heads and reflect or pray, each in your own way. Hon. members, in light of the tragic events unfolding as we speak at the House of Commons in London, U.K., let us take a moment to recognize the bravery and the diligence of the first responders and public servants as well as to offer our deepest sympathies to all those who have and will continue to be affected by this terrible incident. Let us in this Legislative Assembly never forget that it is the first responders who are on the front lines and who risk their lives so that we can exercise our right to speak freely in this Chamber and in this precinct.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly grade 6 students from the Covenant Canadian Reformed School. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Corlisa Pietersma, and chaperones Leo Knol, Judith Dejong, Mona Jissink, Marion Schep, Michelle Peters, Jessica Peters, Gloria Werkman, and Karen Breukelman. I'm honoured to have them all watching question period here today and delighted that the students are learning more about the Legislature and about how democracy works. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you students from John A. McDougall school here in Edmonton-Centre. The students are accompanied by their teachers Mr. Evan S. Asmussen, Ms Veronica Chong, and Ms Silvia Choe. I'd invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you April and Chris MacKinnon from the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Castle Downs. April is a student of the government of Canada program at Algonquin College. She is joined today by her husband, Master Warrant Officer Chris MacKinnon, ETQMS, of the second battalion, PPCLI, based out of Manitoba. He has dedicated 23 years to the Canadian Forces. As a provincial government liaison to the Canadian Forces I want to thank you both for your dedication and service. I would now ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like everyone to give a warm welcome to a very familiar face who certainly attends our gallery, Mr. Les Landry and his wonderful service dog Annie. They are absolutely wonderful examples of passion and dedication in advocacy. Mr. Landry is the president of Respect the Service Dog, an organization raising awareness of service dogs in Alberta, and Annie is a dedicated companion. Mr. Landry is certainly a credit to the perseverance and remarkable attitude of an Alberta advocate. Thank you, Mr. Landry.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you one of my very important constituents, Page Moniz. She is also my constituency assistant and has spent tireless hours helping to organize our Working in Your Community job fair as well as ensuring that all the constituents in Edmonton-Manning are feeling heard and have the information that they need. I would just ask that she please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Avery Anna Roberge-Eadie and Andriy Krugliak. Last November two of our pages, Avery and Andriy, and I had the opportunity to go to Victoria for the eighth Commonwealth Youth Parliament. I will be speaking about this more in my member's statement later. I just had the incredible privilege of being there to witness them in the B.C. Legislature. I would ask that my guests please rise, stand, and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all in this Assembly a friend of mine. One of the absolute joys for those of us that are beginning to show our years is the joy of long friendships. Mr. Bill Parsons and I have known each other since junior high. We have played together as kids, we've prayed together in church, we've attended the same university, we've led the same youth groups, we've attended each other's weddings, and we've helped raise each other's children. That is the value of long friendship. It makes me happy today to ask Bill to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the reeve and councillors of the MD of Taber, home of the best corn in the world: Brian Brewin, Tom Machacek, Merrill Harris, Bob Wallace, Dwight Tolton. And the staff: Jack Dunsmore, Craig Pittman, and Jeremy Wickson. If you could rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other guests today, hon. members? The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Today I have 35 NAIT television and film arts students. They are here together with their instructor, Lamya Asiff. They are here to see the proceedings today, and I hope we can all give them a warm, traditional legislative welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today a friend of mine and a constituent from Grande Prairie-Wapiti, a lifelong farmer and agricultural producer who in past years has served on the Northern Alberta Development Council, Andre Harpe. I think his term is up, and I believe he's in town for his last supper tonight with NADC. If he can stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce three outstanding folks from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. They are fine public servants, that serve their constituents well. I see Rolly Ashdown in the gallery as well as Greg Boehlke and, I believe, Richard Barss. If they would rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Crime Prevention

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are losing their sense of security. As this downturn continues, we're hearing more and more heartbreaking stories of crime, especially in rural communities. In Cold Lake vehicle thefts soared by 80 per cent last year. Grande Prairie was just named the most dangerous city in the country by Stats Canada. In Amisk, a village of just a few hundred people, the ATB was robbed twice in one week. In Airdrie our local CIBC was recently robbed as well, and in Red Deer a carjacking left an innocent man dead. Every day it's something new. The downturn has brought with it a disturbing rise in crime. In the most recent crime severity index Alberta reported an 18 per cent increase, the most of any province.

To make matters worse, victims are watching in disbelief as this government stays trials for those accused of everything from sexual assault to murder. Today on behalf of those victims and their families the Wildrose caucus has launched the Alberta Crime Task Force, saying: enough is enough. The task force will travel around the province, speak directly with Albertans affected by crime, and supply a report complete with recommendations on how best to tackle this crisis. We are also making a survey available online at crimetaskforce.ca so all Albertans can have their voices heard.

Albertans know the justice system is failing them. The government's plan to triage violent crimes is reckless, and Albertans reject it. But as this issue affects all of our constituents, I believe there is room for all of us to work together and find solutions. Recently we saw this government follow a recommendation from the opposition and commit to adding more court resources. This task force will provide a series of new recommendations to this government, recommendations that come straight from Albertans. I hope this

government takes those recommendations seriously and takes this opportunity to help us keep Albertans safe.

Thank you.

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

Response to Anti-Muslim and Anti-Semitic Incidents

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Sunday I had the pleasure of attending the Al-Salam Centre's first Visit Our Mosque event, organized by the Muslim Association of Canada's Calgary chapter. The Al-Salam Centre opened their doors to their new space just about 100 paces from my office in Ranchlands in September, and I can't tell you how proud I am to have this new space in my constituency. It was wonderful to see so many people from our community and across Calgary come out and show their support, learn more about the Muslim faith, and take part in prayer. Visit Our Mosque events are an important show of solidarity for the Muslim community in the face of Islamophobia.

Unfortunately, earlier this month somebody in Ranchlands spread anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic graffiti in one of our parks. When I spoke at the mosque, I reiterated what had been said to me over and over again by members of our community, that these actions do not represent the people of Ranchlands. Those small-minded and bigoted people who carried out these attacks on the Muslim and Jewish communities do not represent those who live in Ranchlands, and our community will not stand for it.

We have seen an increase in attacks on the Muslim and Jewish communities in these past few months and years. It's the job of every single Albertan, both here in the Legislature and outside, to stop this hate from spreading. When we see graffiti, we must erase it; when we hear Islamophobic or anti-Semitic discourse, we must confront it; and when we see our friends and neighbours being attacked for their race or beliefs, we must protect and support them.

Thank you.

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

Parliamentary Debate

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The role we play as legislators is an important one. We're the direct conduit for the people we represent into this House. We champion their voices and their concerns, and we should be doing that with great humility. Our constituents' voices should not be reduced to a headline or a hash tag. We should treat their voices with reverence and respect because each voice is a child in need, a mother out of work, a father who can't make ends meet, a grandparent receiving palliative care.

Mr. Speaker, as we debate in this House, the best way to validate those voices is with solutions and answers. We would be wise to stop the semantics and the grandstanding because they are watching. The mother out of work doesn't care what the party name is. The father who can't make ends meet is focused on food on the table today, not what happened in the last 44 years. The child in need will recoil from the yelling that often takes place in this House and will more likely respond to a thoughtful, respectful dialogue and a tempered tongue. The grandparent in palliative care recognizes wisdom and compassion, not hyped-up rhetoric.

I'm not preaching to others, Mr. Speaker. These are the thoughts I put to myself each and every day as I prepare myself to go to work. I can only control what I say and what I do. To quote a friend, a young man wise beyond his years, Manmeet Bhullar: be better.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I will continue to come to this House with an open heart and an open mind, seeking knowledge which, hopefully, gains me the wisdom to best serve Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Commonwealth Youth Parliament

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This last November I had the incredible opportunity of attending the eighth Commonwealth Youth Parliament, held in Victoria, British Columbia, as a Canadian delegate representing Alberta's Legislature alongside Avery Anna Roberge-Eadie and Andriy Krugliak. Under the watchful eye of Speaker Linda Reid 67 youth from across the world divided into government and opposition parties, where each was required to defend their own positions on issues just like those here at home: climate change, natural resource development, trade policy, and the issue of private versus public delivery of services. At times, partly due to my own encouragement of desk pounding and a bit of heckling, it sounded a bit like home, too.

As a mentor to the youth in the opposition caucus alongside B.C. MLA Jodie Wickens and New South Wales MP Adam Marshall we assisted in speech writing, House business, and debate, teaching our young parliamentarians how to tell their own stories but, most importantly, how to tell the stories of others.

My heart burst, though, Mr. Speaker, when I witnessed our own Avery and Andriy each stand in the B.C. Legislature and share stories of Alberta. They told B.C. and the world about our incredible landscape of mountains, lakes, and great plains; about our resource-driven and dependent economy; our shared values of hard work; and our continued history of progressive social policy, being one of the first provinces where women won the right to vote and recently protecting gender identity and gender expression as human rights. Andriy and Avery are the new face of politics.

Secretary-General Akbar Khan of the Parliamentary Association shared a few words worth repeating, that democracy demands active and involved citizens of all ages taking action to make societies a better place, that young people are increasingly active on political issues that affect them, and how Parliaments must adapt to be more accessible and transparent to all citizens, including actively engaging young people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

LED Light Bulbs and Energy Efficiency

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Speaker, in this Assembly the poor light bulb has become a symbol for criticism. Well, let me try to illuminate some things for the opposition.

Contrary to this belief, the lowly light-emitting diode may be one of the bright ideas of the future. It is actually a compliment because it is an example of a superior idea, modern technology, cost savings, durability, and excellent performance. This technology is going to put money right back into the pockets of Alberta families. The LED bulbs can be six to seven times more energy efficient than conventional, incandescent lights. Unlike incandescent light bulbs, which release 90 per cent of their energy as heat, the LEDs use energy far more efficiently. LEDs can be used in a wide range of applications because of their unique characteristics: compact size, ease of maintenance, resistance to breakage, and the ability to focus the light in a single direction.

Mr. Speaker, this government's energy efficiency program is about helping families in Alberta save money at the end of the month. If the average Alberta family takes advantage of this program, they

will save \$112 on their power bill. This government has also made it easier for families and businesses to install solar panels, and we will move forward with the energy efficiency report's recommendations on programs like helping Albertans buy more efficient and energy-saving appliances.

Meanwhile, the opposition wants to remove our electricity rate cap, so families will go back to the days of price spikes and volatile power bills. We are going to keep moving forward to help families save money.

It's not just light bulbs. This government is going to help families identify opportunities to lower their bills by installing efficient faucets, efficient power bars, and programmable thermostats. Over 70,000 Alberta families are voting with their online clicks. This government is making life more affordable for Albertans.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Public Service Compensation

Mr. Jean: If the NDP doesn't change course soon, Alberta will have the highest debt in all of western Canada. It means more credit downgrades, higher interest rates for government borrowing, more tax hikes, of course, for Alberta families, and all that puts the sustainability of core programs at risk for Albertans. Alberta simply must get control of the cost of salaries across every sector of government. Telling the public sector that they're not getting a wage increase right now isn't unreasonable. It's actually common sense. We need to freeze spending now. Why won't the Premier and her cabinet just admit it?

1:50

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to working with our colleagues in the public service in a respectful way, that respects the contract they have, that respects labour legislation, and, quite frankly, that respects the demands of the Supreme Court of Canada. Grandstanding like the member opposite wants to do is only actually going to end up costing taxpayers more. That isn't good because, as you've probably heard, our government is committed to making life more affordable for Albertans, not less; and we're committed to making life better for Albertans, not worse. That's why we're on this side of the House.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has some of the best public-sector workers in the world. They know and understand that when 80,000 full-time jobs in Alberta have disappeared in the private sector, when our finances have fallen off a cliff, we can't afford to pay for a raise. They get that. Saskatchewan is asking for a pay cut, and now Manitoba has just introduced legislation for a wage freeze. Meanwhile this NDP government is planning to spend billions and billions more for each of the next three years. It's ridiculous. Going deeper into debt and deficit now for public-sector raises simply jeopardizes the sustainability of the public sector in the very near future.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that the member opposite is far more interested in doing things like giving \$600 million in tax giveaways to the folks in Alberta who are struggling to make ends meet on \$300,000 a year; however, that's not our focus. When it comes to dealing with the public servants, who work very hard for the people of Alberta, we will deal

with them with respect. Bargaining is commencing. We will engage with them at the bargaining table, which is exactly the right place for us to do that.

Mr. Jean: While life in government has never been so good, times have never been as tough as they are today out in the real world. Mr. Speaker, Enbridge today announced they were shedding another thousand jobs. Job losses, massive wage cuts, tax hikes, hours cut, businesses in Alberta are closing their doors, and the price of everything is going up under the NDP carbon tax. There's no more money left. This is about protecting the front lines for years to come for Alberta families. Will the Premier ensure that Albertans are not paying for further public-sector wage increases, and if not, why not?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, I think the member opposite really has to stop with the fearmongering. As I'm sure he knows, the vast majority of the jobs that he's referring to from Enbridge are actually being cut in Texas, not in Alberta, and it is not helpful to try and scare Albertans with that kind of misinformation. Albertans deserve better from their public officials on these kinds of issues.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to engaging in a respectful way with our public servants. The member opposite knows full well that management salaries have been frozen, that grid increases have been frozen, and that, unlike his BFF over there, we also significantly brought down the outrageous corporate CEO . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Second main question.

Energy Efficiency Rebate Program Contract

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I've been accused of fearmongering before, and that's not what is happening here. But I will tell you that other people are talking about it, too. Rating agencies, chambers of commerce, and Albertans in general know this NDP budget is a disaster. It increases taxes, increases debt, and has no path to balance and provides no hope whatsoever of sustainable provincial finances. They're literally spending billions of dollars to destroy Alberta jobs. They've shut our coal industry down, and now they're threatening homegrown energy efficiency businesses with their ridiculous deal to have an Ontario company give away free light bulbs. Why is the Premier spending so much money to destroy Alberta businesses?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, again with the fearmongering, Mr. Speaker, and the member opposite not taking the time to get the facts; for instance, on the issue of the successful applicant to work with our energy efficiency program, the Alberta bids on that particular program were three times that of the successful bidder. You don't need to have a game show to figure out what's in the best interest of Albertans. You don't need a *Dragon's Den*. You just make the right choice, and that's what we did.

Mr. Jean: The government has decided they should just cut the knees of everybody who is already in energy efficiency practices in Alberta. End quote. That's the CEO of AIM Energy Pros, David Gray. The NDP are destroying his business model, and he's not alone. It's obvious that this particular deal was a sweetheart contract for an Ontario company, and the NDP keeps promising that there's no cap to this boondoggle. We don't even know how bad it could get, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier release the request for proposal

specifically designed for Ontario Ecofitt, and if she won't, why won't she show Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for the opportunity to reinforce the answer I just gave in my last question. The matter is public. The Alberta bids were three times that of the successful bidder. That, to me, is a good decision on the part of Alberta taxpayers. Moreover, that Ontario company has announced that it's going to move its western Canada headquarters to Alberta and that it will be moving forward to hire Albertans, and it will do so at less cost to taxpayers than the other bids. It makes good sense, and I don't understand what the member opposite is opposed to.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this is NDP policy: spend money to destroy Alberta jobs. If they've got nothing to hide, show Albertans.

Here's an idea as well, Mr. Speaker. Instead of taking people's money to help Ontario businesses, how about keeping the money in people's pockets in the first place? What about that? The fact is that the Premier is taxing Alberta families by billions of new dollars so she can ask an Ontario company to install light bulbs in people's homes here in Alberta. How on earth does she expect any local businesses to survive when she's subsidizing an Ontario company to install free light bulbs for Albertans? Ridiculous.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I've answered that question not once but twice, but what I will say once again is that our government is committed to affordability for Albertans. Unlike the members opposite we are focused on reducing school fees, we are focused on freezing tuition, we are focused on capping electricity rates, and we are focused on helping Albertans reduce their electricity costs by finding more efficiencies. All of this makes life better for Albertans: exactly what we promised we would do.

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

Alberta Hospital Edmonton

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I asked the Minister of Health why she is closing down beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton. She replied, "The assertion that was made by the member opposite is absolutely inconsistent with the facts." Yet I have documents outlining the planned closure and a request from the physicians and multidisciplinary teams for the minister to engage in meaningful dialogue with them before taking this recklessly misguided step. Is the minister closing these ALC beds? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be happy to table *Hansard* for the member opposite. He made all sorts of assertions that this was something that I was doing, that I was kicking people onto the streets. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are making sure that these people who are in these facilities have opportunities to be transitioned into both the community as well as the Royal Alex hospital downtown. We are absolutely open to meeting with the staff if requested and with others to make sure that the space and the beds that are there at Alberta Hospital Edmonton will be there for the long term to serve the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Health minister said yesterday that she works "with experts each and every day" to ensure that "Albertans have access to the right care in the right place

at the right time,” but she won’t explain why a decision to move such an important mental health facility to an emergency ward was made without consultation with experts. The psychiatrists say that she has not consulted with them and that this decision is part of a disastrous trend of dismantling Alberta Hospital Edmonton. Why is the minister ignoring the front-line experts?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand that they have concerns because under 44 years of Conservative reign in this province there was no support for Alberta Hospital Edmonton and regularly it was attacked. But I have to tell you that as long as there’s an NDP government . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hold the clock.

Keep it down.

Start the clock again.

Continue.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As long as there’s an NDP government in Alberta, there will be Alberta Hospital Edmonton, and we are making sure that we support Alberta Hospital Edmonton, support community options, and support the Royal Alex hospital. That’s why we’re expanding services in this province, not making drastic cuts like the members opposite keep asking us to.

The Speaker: Second supplemental. [interjections]

Hold it down.

2:00

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there has been an erosion of trust between physicians and AHS management and given that physicians claim to fear retribution from AHS, including anxiety around contract renewals that they advocate for patients, and since a student was publicly reprimanded by a member of AHS management for voicing their concerns, will this minister lead by example and improve the work climate at AHS?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can’t help but point out some of the irony between this first set of questions and their questions now. They’re asking us to treat public servants with respect. We want to treat them with respect. That’s why we are offering opportunities to meet in person. That’s why we sit down at the table and have respectful negotiations and dialogue. I am more than happy to. I meet with doctors across this province every day, and I am honoured to continue that. Absolutely, members of the health profession have every right and responsibility to be advocating for their patients.

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

Economic Indicators

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When this NDP government came into office, the debt-to-GDP ratio was an enviable 3.2 per cent, but even before the next election it will be 19.5 per cent, worse than B.C. and Saskatchewan, and further increasing at a rate of 4 per cent per year. At the rate this government is going, Alberta’s ratio will be the worst in Canada within one decade. So to the Minister of Finance: do you really think it’s a good idea to be boasting about such a massive failure?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, you know, nothing could be further from the truth, of course. This year it will be 13.4 per cent; 13.4 per cent at the end of this term is right in the low part of all provinces. All provinces far outstrip us in terms of debt to GDP. We’ll continue to have great fundamentals in this province. We’ll continue to have low taxes in this province all because this side of the House cares about making life more affordable for Albertans everywhere.

Mr. Rodney: Even after the incredible damage that this government has wreaked on the Alberta economy and way of life, the NDP are fond of boasting about Alberta’s projected economic growth of 2.4 per cent for 2017, which, by the way, is a far cry from Alberta continuously leading the country prior to the NDP taking office. We had growth rates of 3.9 per cent in both 2012, 2013 and 4 per cent in 2014. While the NDP has been in government, the economic growth rate has been negative 4 per cent in 2015, negative 2.4 per cent in 2016. The constriction of the Alberta economy is the opposite of a success, so again to the Minister of Finance: is it a good idea to be boasting about this?

Mr. Ceci: Has the hon. member not been part of life for the last two years? Do you not know that we’ve had a recession in this province? We didn’t cause that recession; world oil prices caused that recession. This year we’re going to lead the country in GDP growth at 2.6 per cent. Alberta is coming back, Mr. Speaker. They’re just in a fantasy, thinking that we on this side caused it. That’s not true.

Mr. Rodney: Back to reality. It’s called making a bad situation worse.

The Finance minister also regularly boasts about the NDP’s so-called job-creation strategy, but the facts tell a completely different story. Alberta’s unemployment rate, Mr. Speaker, over the two years with the NDP government has been 6 per cent in 2015, 8 per cent in 2016, and a forecast of 8.4 per cent for 2017, and this is with 6,000 new FTEs created in government during that time. For the years prior the unemployment rate was 4.6 per cent in 2012, 4.7 per cent in both 2013 and 2014. To the Minister of Finance: do you really think it is such a great idea to be boasting about this other massive failure?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Ceci: You know, Mr. Speaker, I will get up each and every time and proclaim how good Alberta is. I will get up and stand up for this province. That side seems to think that if they talk about the negative things going on, somehow we’re going to fold our tent and go away. We’re not. We’re going to stand up for Alberta, for Alberta jobs, for Alberta people.

The Speaker: Calgary-Mountain View.

Mental Health Patient Advocate

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday I raised concerns about how each year the Mental Health Patient Advocate office’s work increases but the resources do not. The 2015-16 annual report yesterday revealed a significant increase in caseload, yet it was only able to initiate one formal investigation in all of last year. Same staff count as 1990. The associate minister recognized the importance of the Mental Health Patient Advocate’s role but pointed out that funding in Budget 2017 will stay the same. Why isn’t the minister backing up her words with action?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for the question. As we discussed on Monday, the Mental Health Patient Advocate is a very important position, and we are actively recruiting to fill that role. We also need to make sure that we're improving access to mental health supports for Albertans so that we can help diminish some of that caseload work by making sure that we've got services available to Albertans when and where they need them. I am proud to say that Budget 2017 is delivering on that promise.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, this is about funding for the mental health advocate.

The commitment to new funding to implement the mental health review is promising. Unfortunately, it doesn't address the Mental Health Patient Advocate's inability to do formal investigations for people calling for help. Since 1990 the number of people has tripled, the number of issues has quadrupled, and investigations continue to take more time due to complexity. Why is the government allowing this situation to continue by not properly resourcing the advocate's office?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As I said, we are very proud of the work that the mental health advocate has been able to do on behalf of Albertans, and we will continue to support that role and that office. We are also ensuring that we are able to expand access to services, working in the community and with mental health practitioners both inside and outside of Alberta Health Services as well as partners within the community. That is one way that we're working to make life better for Albertans.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about Albertans in this case. We're talking about a mental health advocate that has no resources to do her job.

One of the most interesting items in the 2015-16 annual report is the fact that the mental health advocate's office did not use its entire budget last year. It seems odd given the advocate's 2015 remarks that there was a critical lack of resources. I understand that approval is required to fill vacant positions and get additional staff even if the funds are available. To the minister: did the government impose last year a hiring and spending restraint on the advocate's office, and if so, why?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government has implemented hiring restraint measures across government, ensuring that when positions become vacant, they are being filled when they are critical to the role and to the work of government, including implementing our mandate. A huge part of our mandate is ensuring that Albertans have access to the mental health supports that they need. It is a reality that recruitment takes time and that for these important positions we want to make sure that we are filling them with the right person so that we are able to help make life better for Albertans.

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

Independent Postsecondary Institution Funding

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our province deals with many inconsistencies in funding of independent academic institutions. These colleges and universities receive block funding that does not require any achievement in enrolment. In fact, some even

see declines in numbers. To the Minister of Advanced Education: why do we see these differences in funding?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, we inherited this system from the previous government, and we're committed to making it better. Campus Alberta grants are not purely enrolment based for any institution, be they independent or not. A review of this funding model is under way, and the member can look forward to recommendations later this year. I'd like all members of this Assembly to know that this government is protecting and improving postsecondary education and all the things that make life better for Albertans, and a better funding model will help to achieve this.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that St. Mary's University in Calgary-Shaw has a lower amount of funding per student compared to many other postsecondary institutions in the province, to the same minister: how is this government going to address this going forward?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, firstly, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for being such a tireless advocate for his constituency. For independent schools like St. Mary's the operating grants go only to programs which are approved by government. Within these programs the funding per-student number is higher than it would be for the school overall. Budget 2017 for the third year in a row gives a 2 per cent increase to all postsecondary institutions, including St. Mary's. Our government is committed to stable and predictable funding for all of our institutions. As I said, the member can look forward to the results of the funding review that will be completed later this fall.

2:10

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government is looking into long-term funding sustainability of postsecondary education in Alberta, to the same minister: will independent postsecondaries have a voice in the conversation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I assure the member that independent academic institutions like St. Mary's have been and will have a voice in these important conversations. St. Mary's in particular has played a significant role in our postsecondary system, and I'm proud of the work that they're doing in many areas such as their indigenous partnerships and initiatives. They've also been a great partner in this funding conversation, and I look forward to continuing to work together to make our system more affordable, accessible, and high quality for all of the students in Alberta.

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

Labour Legislation Review

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Historically Alberta has had a strong economy, with workers travelling from other jurisdictions to take the opportunity of our well-paying jobs. Data from the federal government shows that our province has fewer work stoppages and lost days of work relative to the rest of Canada, but this government claims a need to undertake a review of our Labour Relations Code, risking our labour peace. Will the minister please explain to Albertans what is wrong with our current labour

relations laws that warrants a review while Albertans need jobs and a stable economy? Is this review just to appease organized labour?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Standing up for families means making sure that Albertans have access to fair and family-friendly workplaces. We have workplace legislation in this province that has not been updated in decades. Making sure that Albertans are able to take advantage of things like bereavement leave or being able to take a day off to attend a funeral, items that other Canadians have, is something that I want to talk to Albertans about. This is an important conversation to have because having workplace legislation decades out of date is not reasonable.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that this government has mandated Andrew Sims to assist the Labour ministry in carrying out this review and given that Mr. Sims already carried out an extensive review of our labour laws – his report was published in 2014 – and given that stakeholders asked the government not to implement the recommendations contained within that report, will the minister please explain why they are hiring Mr. Sims, a recent large donor to the NDP, to write another report? What will be different this time, and how is the minister ensuring Mr. Sims will return an independent report?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to have Mr. Andrew Sims assisting us. This is a very important labour lawyer in the Alberta labour relations community, that the previous government also relied on for information. In 2014 he reviewed the construction section of the Labour Relations Code, not the entire Labour Relations Code. We have asked him to take a targeted review because it's important that Albertans are able to trust and rely that we have workplace legislation that will work for themselves and their families.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that this government's online survey to solicit feedback from the public is only on the employment standards portion of this labour review and not on labour relations and given that the decisions made about these laws have the potential to disrupt labour peace in this province and given that this review has employers and workers worried about what this review means for their futures, will the minister please tell us the criteria to receive an invitation to engage with Mr. Sims on these important matters, and what is she doing to ensure that the whole review process is fair and transparent?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta businesses deserve laws that help them attract the best and the brightest. Our legislation is out of date and out of practice with other jurisdictions. We need to make sure that Albertans are engaged in this process, and I invite all Albertans to come to the website to fill out the information, the survey, or to provide their thoughts on labour legislation. We will be contacting stakeholders and setting up meetings, and I will be making sure that all of the information submitted to the review is taken into account. It is puzzling to me that the opposition does not want us to engage in a consultation with Albertans. Then again, this is the opposition that would roll back minimum wage.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Provincial Fiscal Position

Mr. Fraser: When this NDP government came into power, they inherited a financial position that was the envy of jurisdictions around the world. Over the first few years of their term we've seen this once strong position rapidly decline into nothing short of financial chaos. For example, this government gleefully accepted a \$6.5 billion contingency fund, which they have since drained completely to spend on day-to-day activities of this administration. Minister, why does the budget state that the forecast year-end figure for the contingency fund will be \$2.3 billion, only for it to be drained once again this year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Those are monies that will be borrowed for operational purposes and drawn down during the course of the year. You know, the PC balanced budget plan: I just want to take a minute to talk about the \$5.8 billion in cuts that you would propose to happen in one year. Those reckless cuts would make so much happen in Alberta that would hurt families. Your math is wrong. Your ideas are wrong. People don't want \$5 billion in cuts. They want stable services, they want investments across our economy, and they want stability.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that another thing that this government gleefully accepted was a very low level of debt that was accumulated under previous Progressive Conservative governments and given that the NDP government set a goal of not exceeding a debt-to-GDP ratio of 15 per cent and almost immediately broke that goal by borrowing even more, Minister, is your government prepared to put another GDP percentage limit in place, or are you afraid you're going to break that one, too?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think I stood up here a few minutes ago and said that we'll continue to have one of the lowest debt-to-GDP ratios of all provinces in Canada. I also said that the \$5.8 billion in cuts would mean that the whole Advanced Education budget would have to go. Additionally, your cuts would mean that health care would have to be severely taken back. You have \$1.5 billion in cuts. Do you really think that's possible? I don't think so. Other notable cuts would mean that the whole Culture and Tourism ministry would have to go, Economic Development and Trade would have to go. All of these things would have to go.

Mr. Speaker, theirs don't add up. They would make . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. Thank you. We are on the second supplemental, I believe.

Mr. Fraser: Given that this government is borrowing a total of \$2.8 billion more to pay for operating costs than they are spending on capital projects and given that borrowing to keep the lights on without funding efficiencies won't help pay for the critical infrastructure Albertans need, Minister, spending more time and money adding zeroes to debt I don't think jibes with Albertans and their priorities. Do you?

Mr. Ceci: What we know in these tough economic times is that Albertans want the security of knowing their government is investing in job creation, their government has stable services and programs like education and health care, and their government cares about doing the things they need on a daily basis for today

and the future. That's what this side of the House is concerned with. That side of the House is just concerned with putting down Albertans, doing things that would further make life difficult for Albertans by cutting billions and billions out of a current budget today. That's not good business sense for this province nor Albertans' future.

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Crime Prevention

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are losing their sense of security. Day after day we're hearing new heartbreaking stories about violent crimes, especially in rural communities. Alberta's crime severity index ballooned by 18 per cent since 2015, the most in the country. Today Wildrose launched the Alberta Crime Task Force on behalf of victims and their families. We're saying that enough is enough. The task force will complete a report and provide this government with recommendations to protect Albertans. Will this government implement our recommendations and help us keep Albertans safe?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's obviously critical to every Albertan and every Alberta family that they live in safe communities. That's one of the main goals of my ministry, and we work very hard at it. We're willing to listen to ideas from absolutely anywhere. I had the opportunity to meet recently with experts on this issue and to meet with the new deputy commissioner of the RCMP. I'm convinced he will work very hard on this issue. I think we're going to continue to follow expert advice on this matter.

2:20

Mrs. Pitt: That's disappointing.

Mr. Speaker, this government recently embraced the opposition's call to add more court resources, and we're very grateful for that. But given that small communities like Amisk are seeing a startling increase in crime, including the local ATB being robbed twice in just one week, and given that the Justice minister failed to attend a meeting in Amisk on this issue of rural crime, why is this government reacting instead of leading and leaving it up to the opposition to fight for those affected by the rise in violent crime?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, pretty much everything in that preamble there was incorrect. To begin with, the Leader of the Official Opposition came out immediately, before we injected these resources, and said specifically, "It's not a resource problem; let's study the issue" and proposed a bill to do just that. We took action. We injected resources because that is the right course of action.

With respect to the folks in Amisk department officials have already reached out to them and met with them. Unfortunately, you know, with 20 minutes' notice, I was unable to make that meeting. But we are happy to meet with them in the future and to work with all communities to ensure that all Albertans feel safe.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, this government has failed in protecting victims, and Albertans know that. Given that they've been triaging cases of violent crime, staying more than 200 criminal charges for alleged criminals accused of everything from sexual assault and first degree murder, will this government act like a leader instead of a follower, restore some faith in our justice system, and amend the ridiculous triage policy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government has been taking concrete action. When the Jordan decision came down into a system that had been backlogged over decades, we took immediate action. We had two choices. We could either let serious and violent crimes be stayed by the court for being over the time frame, or we could take action to triage those matters to ensure that serious and violent crimes were prioritized and to protect the safety of all Albertans. That's exactly what we did. We injected resources when the opposition said that we should cut. We are taking real action. They have nothing but talk. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. [interjections] Order. Thank you.

The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A code red was called last week in Calgary. Icy conditions caused ambulance calls to double on Thursday morning. According to the president of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, Calgary regularly experiences ambulance shortages. To alleviate these code reds, out-of-town EMS units are often utilized within our larger centres. Can you explain how this code red affects patient care in the surrounding areas, whose ambulances helped support Calgary during this most recent event?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We know that when you call 911, nothing is more important than knowing that help is on the way and that first responders are going to be there as quickly as possible to support you, and it's important to us. The 5,500 paramedics that we have in the province are responding to about 500,000 calls each and every year. We're committed to making sure that we work to support the front lines, making sure that any reductions to budgets that AHS thinks they can achieve will not impact the front lines. That's why we're working to make sure that life is getting better for Alberta families.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, despite Health's best attempts EMS response times still haven't improved. In fact, this government increased response time thresholds. Ambulances are still stuck at hospitals waiting for patient hand-offs, and we continue to have code reds despite utilizing out-of-town ambulances in our metropolitan cities. How well do you know your file, Minister of Health? How many times were code reds called last year?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A great deal of information is available online. We try to be very open and transparent about challenges that are happening in the system. But I also want to reinforce that while 32 per cent growth has happened since 2011, EMS response times have remained steady. I think that's important for us to know. It is important for us to make them even shorter, though, and that's one of the reasons why we're standing up for stable health care funding and investment, not reckless and extreme cuts like the members opposite are proposing.

Mr. Yao: It's unfortunate that you don't know your file.

Yesterday the Minister of Health stated that reductions to ambulance services would not affect front-line workers, that the cost savings were available due to the fact that we paid off our

ambulances. Given that ambulances and emergency medical equipment require regular maintenance and replacement, is it the minister's plan to leave our EMS services with an infrastructure debt?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know what it's like to inherit an infrastructure deficit because for decades under Conservative governments in this province we saw cut after cut after cut and we saw the increase in delayed infrastructure maintenance happen throughout the province. Absolutely, I'm committed to making sure that we're investing and making sure that we're maintaining and catching up with the backlog that we've seen. I think it's good news that we have ambulances that are paid in full. I wish the members opposite would support Albertans, support us in finding ways to make sure that we can have strong public health care instead of always arguing for us to privatize it.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, developing initiatives and strategies to move individuals through the housing continuum from affordable housing to market rental and attainable home ownership is an integral part of any modern housing strategy. This government has been dragging its feet on delivering an affordable housing strategy. Worse, the minister has sown frustration and nervousness as she continually hints at rent controls and openly sets aside partnering with the private sector. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: when will the affordable housing strategy be released, and will it contain any innovative initiatives to move hard-working Albertans through the housing continuum?

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our government is dedicated to making sure people have the affordable housing they need in this province. That's why we invested \$1.2 billion in our capital plan. There are over 40 projects under way currently and more to come. Investment in maintenance was long overdue because that government did not invest and units had to be closed, so people do not have the homes they need. Our government, rest assured, is investing right now.

Mr. Gotfried: Interesting given that there are no RFPs out there.

Mr. Speaker, given that I personally championed attainable home ownership, developing one of Alberta's first CMHC-approved programs almost 10 years ago, and given that this program was a tremendous success because it avoided creating ghettos, assisted hard-working families in purchasing their first home, and despite this government's distaste created an effective public-private nonprofit partnership, again to the minister: given that private builders are ready and willing to collaborate with this government to deliver high-quality, affordable, and attainable homes, why do you continue with your stated predisposition for public ownership?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud to work with our housing management bodies all across this province who are dedicated to supporting people in their communities. We have over a hundred housing management bodies who are doing excellent work across the province. Just to speak about the provincial affordable housing strategy, we had extensive consultation. That report will be available in the spring – the

member will be hearing about it soon – and we're very proud of the work we're doing on that.

Mr. Gotfried: Spring has sprung, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the ministry's business plan contains no performance measures tied to delivering cost-effective affordable housing units and given the fact that leveraging money for the greatest benefit is an essential part of building all forms of social housing and given that the business plan contains no reference to the private sector, consistent with the minister's stated preference that social housing be built and operated by government, again to the minister: why are you ignoring evidence and advice from sector leaders by completely excluding the private sector from your business plan?

Ms Sigurdson: In tough economic times everyday Albertans deserve a government that makes life better, and we're supporting people to have homes to live in here. We inherited 15,000 families on wait-lists for affordable housing in this province. We're changing that completely by investing \$1.2 billion in our capital plan, and we're very proud of our work that we're doing with our housing management bodies, who are serving vulnerable Albertans very well.

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

Student Enrolment and School Construction

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Edmonton-South West is filled with young families that are worried about the future of their children because of growing enrolment pressures. Given the increasing demand for enrolment in schools across this province, to the Minister of Education: what is the government doing to ensure that schools are equipped to handle this growth in demand?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we're doing a great deal to deal with growth across the province. Announced through Budget 2017 for a third year in a row our government is funding for enrolment growth, which is around 1.8 per cent. That means 12,000 students have a place to go, have a teacher in front of them, and extra supports in the classroom. In the last three years we have put \$973 million more into that, in operating, than the previous government was going to do before they lost the election.

2:30

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that enrolment pressures mean that we need more schools for our children, to the same minister again: what is the minister doing to ensure that we are building enough schools for every child and enough space?

Mr. Eggen: Well, just yesterday our government announced that we have 26 new school projects across the province. We're providing funding for eight new schools, modernizations and building other schools and replacements as well. These projects will address the many growth areas across the province, revitalizing old schools in rural areas, in rural areas, and in urban areas, a very, very proud program, Mr. Speaker. We're building these schools because we know that one of the most important investments you can make for the future is to make sure that education is strong in Alberta.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that existing high schools around my constituency are currently at capacity and filling up more and more every day, with the pressure coming from elementary and junior high schools, to the same minister: will the Minister of Education commit to building a new high school for the communities of Edmonton-South West?

Mr. Eggen: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, I have demands from all over the province in regard to building new schools. We see continued growth, which I think is a strong indication of people making investment in Alberta, raising their families in Alberta and so forth. Under due consideration based on enrolment, based on need, based on geography, we have the deliberations over schools. Twenty-six school projects in these economic times: I think that's something we can be really, really proud of.

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

New School Construction in Rocky View County

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Right now the Rocky View school division is out of room for students and the school boards desperately need additional schools. The community has a school that is on the government's list but is still unfunded. The NDP government's reason for not moving forward on our school build is that our municipalities do not have serviced school sites ready. We heard that the site plan is ready, and residents expected a school built. To the minister: can you please explain to the Chestermere-Rocky View constituents what constitutes site ready?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we have to make decisions across the province based on site readiness and based on enrolment and so forth. I must say as well that Rocky View in general received two new schools in the announcement that we had yesterday. I recognize the need for said school that the hon. member was mentioning. We are certainly deliberating over those things. Because of our long-term investment in building infrastructure and investing in schools, at least the people in Chestermere-Rocky View will know that they will be satisfied in a very short time.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Given that Chestermere has grown by 34 per cent since 2011 and that 30 per cent of our residents are under the age of 20 and given that you have just said that we have funded for growth and enrolment and given that Chestermere schools take in kids from all surrounding areas and that our rural communities don't have very many alternatives – we can't just bus them to another school – when will Chestermere-Rocky View see our K to 9 school built? And what are the two schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we see these growth pressures in many areas such as Chestermere and Airdrie, in suburban Edmonton and Leduc and so forth, so we are meeting these needs over time. It's difficult because I know that the previous Conservative government had built up a huge backlog of infrastructure, that we are now satisfying and building towards. You can only do that by making investments and planning. You can't do that by cutting budgets. You can't build schools out of the air. We're building them with concrete and bricks and mortar and putting teachers in the schools.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Given that East Lake school can no longer support any more portables and is still overcrowded and given that Rainbow Creek needs four more portables and received one, leaving that school completely overcrowded as well, and since these are just examples from my riding – overcrowded schools and lack of spaces is a systemic problem, Minister – can you please clarify to school boards what the criteria is to have their priorities end up on your funded list? And what are the two schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The schools that will be built in the Rocky View school district area: one is Catholic and one is public. You can get the list, and I would be glad to show you. We announced it yesterday.

News flash: you can't build schools and put teachers in them and then advocate for cuts at the same time. So before you hitch your wagon, I would suggest that you hitch your wagon to some kind of neo-conservative brave new world. I would suggest that maybe you think about teachers and schools properly, categorically, and not . . .

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

Access to Information

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the few tools the opposition has to hold the government to account is our ability to access information through FOIP requests. Any delay in accessing information under this act can be seen as an affront to democracy. Unfortunately, our office has experienced a number of significant delays, including directly from Executive Council. To the Premier: are your staff interfering in the FOIP process to prevent unflattering information from being released to the public?

Ms Hoffman: No way, Mr. Speaker. We inherited a system that was chronically underfunded. We've inherited an opposition that likes to call for deep cuts. This government is putting our money where our mouth is, including staffing FOIP offices at a level that will enable us to get far closer to achieving the guidelines outlined in the legislation than the Official Opposition would have us do. They call for cuts. They call for increased access. We're putting our money where it belongs, which is in making sure that we have the good services, including FOIP officers, to be able to meet the demand of increased requests.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Information and Privacy Commissioner recently concluded that FOIP requests made to PAB and Executive Council were taking an average of 50 days to process and given that these lengthy delays only serve to keep the opposition parties, the media, and everyday hard-working Albertans in the dark about the inner workings of the government, Premier: seriously, how do you account for these delays? Come on.

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have about a decade of experience in filing FOIP requests, so this is a very fun question to answer. There were times where I had to wait in excess of a year, under the former government, to get my FOIP back. We are very proud of the progress we're making. We're working in

collaboration with the public service and with all applicants, no matter who those applicants are, whether they're members of the public, the media, or other parties within this Legislature. We'll continue to make sure that we staff offices appropriately even when the members opposite are asking every day for us to cut billions of dollars. We're making sure that we put resources to make sure that we have transparency and make life better.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Gill: Let me try again. Given that Alberta's Information and Privacy Commissioner said that the freedom of information in government departments is, quote, fast approaching a crisis, unquote, and that Commissioner Clayton also said, and I quote, I hate to hear that FOIP is not being taken seriously, unquote, Premier: why is your government interfering with FOIP, and what are you trying to hide from Albertans?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Nice try, Member. I have to say that in 2015, when we took office, FOIP requests were taking 12 to 15 months under that former government. Now we've got them down to three to six months at Executive Council. That's significant progress. Is it far enough? No. We want to go further. We want to achieve the timelines outlined in the legislation, and that's why we're continuing to make sure that we're allocating resources properly. But the assertions by the member opposite couldn't be further from reality. We've cut the wait times significantly from when your party was in power.

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

Housing for Persons with Complex Needs

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since my election I've had social workers and front-line staff approach me with concerns about the quality of housing available to individuals with complex needs. They tell me about substandard living conditions, a lack of proper supports. Indeed, some of the sites they've identified have had multiple suites condemned as unfit for human habitation. It seems clear to me that some needs of our society shouldn't be abandoned to the market, as previous governments have done. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: how is our government taking responsibility to ensure individuals with complex challenges can access safe, dignified, supportive places to live?

The Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is protecting and improving things that make a difference. We believe that everyone deserves to live with dignity and have opportunities to thrive. We provided \$13 million in Budget '15-16 for housing projects that support individuals with complex needs, and this includes projects across this province. We will continue to ensure that the supports Albertans need are in place, and we won't make reckless cuts that will make life harder for Albertans.

Thank you.

2:40

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that wraparound support services are essential to housing individuals who are chronically homeless due to physical or other mental health issues, developmental disabilities, substance use, or

combinations of all and given that these individuals are going without essential services like bathing because the only place they can afford to live is deemed unsafe for workers, what steps is the minister taking to increase support for wraparound services and new affordable housing projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is ensuring that individuals with complex needs facing homelessness have a safe place to call home. That is why in this year's budget we will be increasing funding for homeless and outreach support by \$6 million, for a total of \$187 million. This means we are strengthening the wraparound supports offered through the housing first program throughout this province. We know that housing first reduces the use of the corrections and health systems. Just compare the \$100,000 cost per person in the use of these systems versus \$40,000 through housing first initiatives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that support services are only part of the equation and that there must also be investment in both maintenance to keep existing housing dignified and inhabitable as well as in constructing new housing for those in need, to the Minister of Seniors and Housing: what concrete investments is the government making to ensure my constituents can get the supports they need in safety and dignity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The previous government did not prioritize affordable housing, and that's why so many units are in disrepair. We are proud to be investing \$57 million in making sure that this affordable housing maintenance is taken care of. For Edmonton-Centre, the riding will receive approximately \$602,000 for repairs at facilities like Renfrew apartments and Kiwanis Place Lodge. While we're making life better for Albertans, the opposition would make life harder by cutting from these programs.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll deal with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Energy Policies

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I will not be told by members on the NDP government side that I do not support our energy industry, members too cowardly to admit to Albertans that their toxic carbon tax forces the juniors to subsidize their competition.

Let me tell you what not supporting Alberta's energy industry looks like. This NDP government has come in and fostered division in a once united industry. This NDP government's managed decline of our key industry by capping the oil sands will leave Alberta's youth unemployed. This NDP government plays favorites and enacts harmful consequences for any company that dares not beat their drum while chanting favorably about the NDP's destructive, anti-Albertan world view. This NDP government attends international gala conferences on the dime of hard-working Albertans, only to sell out and apologize to the people that besmirch and demonize our industry.

This NDP government cowers in shame and apologizes to a federal government that wants to vilify our energy producers for meeting the needs of people seeking a better quality of life, a federal government too blinded by its misguided focus to recognize the immense number of their beloved social programs that would cease to exist without Alberta footing the bill for Quebec and Ontario through obscene equalization payments.

Alberta's energy industry is the most innovative, environmentally responsible, and socially generous in the entire world. This didn't happen because of social engineering, Mr. Speaker. It happened because of Albertans working in every level of industry, fighting tirelessly to protect and build up our province's legacy. These hard-working Albertans do not deserve a government that implements reckless policy after reckless policy, driving away investors. Those Albertans deserve a government that will enact policies that give all energy companies a level playing field.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that were presented on Monday, March 20, 2017, in record time. As chair of the committee I can advise the Assembly that the petitions comply with standing orders 90 to 94.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 204 Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and request leave to introduce Bill 204, Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017.

I'd like to begin by thanking Parliamentary Counsel once again. Without their assistance, this bill would not have been possible, so thank you very much.

This bill is a culmination of many years of advocacy, dating back to 2009, when the Alberta Land Stewardship Act was introduced. That legislation limited property rights without notice or adequate compensation. Bill 204 proposes to correct this through amending the Alberta Land Stewardship Act and the Responsible Energy Development Act to ensure Albertans will again have the right to a fair hearing if their rights are affected and have recourse to the courts when their lands or interests are affected by a regional plan.

Another vital issue, though, that this bill now addresses is the loophole in the Land Titles Act that allows an individual to obtain title and ownership of land through something called adverse possession. Bill 204 will repeal section 74 of the Land Titles Act, finally ending adverse possession in Alberta. This change has been a very long time in coming. I'm proud to be introducing this bill, that addresses these long-standing grievances.

In closing, I look forward to discussing this bill with my colleagues on all sides of the House and ultimately winning their support for this important piece of legislation. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table two documents. The first is the requisite number of copies of a petition presented to me by constituents concerned about upcoming legal changes that may impact age-restricted condominiums.

The second is the requisite number of copies of the letters from the doctors at the Alberta Hospital Edmonton about the closing down of 20 alternative-level care beds.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings if I may. The first is a tabling with the appropriate number of copies from the Alberta Mental Health Patient Advocate annual report 2014-15, that I cited in question period on Monday and today, in which that advocate stated that lack of funding "had a direct impact on the number of Albertans . . . served and the comprehensiveness of our investigations" and that "the inability to conduct formal investigations were largely due to lack of resources." Thank you.

Another tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of the executive summary of the farm worker insurance study by Alberta agriculture and rural development, which shows (a) income loss from injury and death in Alberta farm workers, (b) a comparison of costs between commercial insurance and WCB coverage, and (c) a summary of uninsured farm worker economics. Overall the report recommended under the former PC government WCB coverage for farm workers.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter I wrote to the Government House Leader. In that letter to the Government House Leader I quote a statement from the Minister of Education decrying the Public Affairs Bureau as political.

2:50

The Speaker: I believe, hon. members, we're at points of order. I received a note. I understand that the Opposition House Leader withdraws the point of order.

In addition, there was a point of privilege raised yesterday, and there was a request by the government to speak to the matter. I'd recognize the Deputy Government House Leader.

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Matters of privilege are, obviously, very serious, and we feel that they ought not be raised lightly. Unfortunately, I think that that is exactly what is happening here. The opposition are trying to revive a debate on a matter that has been dealt with by this House. This is clearly not a matter of privilege. Let's be clear about what it is. It's the latest tactic being used by the opposition to try to justify the unjustifiable, that being that the Member for Calgary-Hays has been found to be in violation of the Conflicts of Interest Act. For the first time ever the Ethics Commissioner has recommended a penalty be levied under the act, yet they want him to be off the hook or to delay the matter significantly.

In making my argument, I'll be referring to a number of citations that also came up last week when the members tried their first line of delay in arguing that the matter should be considered sub judice.

To summarize, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite refer to the Member for Calgary-Hays' privilege, but they ignore the fundamental privilege of the Assembly in setting and enforcing rules governing the conduct of its members. May's *Parliamentary Practice* on page 75 defines parliamentary privilege as "the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively as a constituent part of the High Court of Parliament, and by Members of each House individually." *Beauchesne's* is very clear that "the most fundamental privilege of the House as a whole is to establish rules of procedure for itself and to enforce them." It's very clear that the House as a collective body has collective privileges as well as the power to enforce those rules.

In some cases these powers could lead to far more significant discipline than what is being contemplated here. In *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* Maingot asserts that

the privilege of control over its own affairs and proceedings is one of the most significant attributes of an independent legislative institution,

further stating:

The right to regulate its own internal affairs and procedures free from interference includes:

1. The right to enforce discipline on Members of the House of Commons by suspension, commitment, and expulsion.

This is at page 183.

Maingot further expands on the collective rights of the House as follows.

The corporate or collective privileges of the Senate and of the House of Commons are the power to punish for contempt . . . the right to regulate its own constitution; the right to regulate its own internal affairs free from interference, which includes the right to discipline its own Members; the right to institute inquiries and call for witnesses . . . and the right to settle its own code of procedure.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that the Assembly has the power to set and to enforce rules, and that is exactly what has happened here.

The Assembly in its wisdom passed legislation, namely the Conflicts of Interest Act, to govern specifically conflicts of interest. The act provides statutory authority for an independent officer of the Assembly, the Ethics Commissioner, to investigate matters, make rulings, and recommend penalties to the Assembly. The Ethics Commissioner investigated an allegation against the Member for Calgary-Hays, found the member in breach, and recommended a sanction.

What the member is suggesting is that the one and only time that such a power has ever been used, we should ignore them. Mr. Speaker, this doesn't just go to the fundamental privilege of the House but to the public's faith in us and our ability to be held accountable through the rules that we pass ourselves. The Assembly has now passed a motion to concur in the recommendation as it is a fundamental right and privilege of this Assembly.

With regard to the general principle of freedom of speech the members ought to know that freedom of speech is not unlimited, particularly for those of us who have duties flowing from the powers vested in us as members.

In *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, page 14, it is noted that the rights of members are subject to the procedures of the House.

While it will be seen that the Member enjoys all the immunity necessary to perform his parliamentary work, this privilege or right, such as freedom of speech, is nevertheless subject to the practices and procedures of the House.

Maingot further discusses freedom of speech on page 180 and states:

Since Article 9 of the Bill of Rights, 1689 prohibits the questioning of the proceedings of Parliament in any place outside Parliament, those participating in its proceedings, principally the

Members but also witnesses, petitioners and others, are protected against any outside interference for what they say or do within.

These persons are also subject to the disciplinary powers of the House for their conduct during the proceedings.

We all know that the right to free speech in the Assembly is not unlimited. Chapter 18 of *Erskine May* notes a number of limits that the House may impose on the contents of speeches. To name the most obvious examples, we all know that members are not supposed to use unparliamentary language, nor are members allowed to knowingly mislead the House. Further, there are provisions within the standing orders such as Standing Order 21 on time allocation, which on occasion can be used to limit debate.

With regard to potential conflicts of interest *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, by O'Brien and Bosc, explicitly discusses the practice whereby members ought not to participate in matters where there may be a private interest. They state on page 128:

Members are required to disclose a private interest in a matter before the House or a committee and to refrain from participating in debate or voting on the question . . . If the Commissioner concludes that the Member has deliberately contravened the conflict of interest guidelines set down in the Code, the Commissioner may recommend appropriate sanctions. The Member is then subject to the disciplinary powers of the House, if the House chooses to take action.

Mr. Speaker, anyone who watches debate regularly in the House will have seen time to time members recusing themselves from participation in particular debate, often on recommendation of the Ethics Commissioner. In fact, in the caucus of the member who raised this matter, the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster recused himself from debating a bill that would have had a pecuniary interest for his spouse. That took place on December 5, 2016, and can be found on page 2295 of *Hansard*.

On this point it is worth remembering that the initial reaction from the Member for Calgary-Hays when the Ethics Commissioner ruled that he had been in violation was to accept the ruling. He immediately issued a statement which included the following:

I fully accept responsibility for my actions and going forward, I will continue to not participate in any question period activity, debate or vote in relation to Alberta's electric utility industry until such a time that the Ethics Commissioner gives me permission to do so.

While he may have received some advice in the interim about delaying this matter, clearly he didn't believe at the time that this was a fundamental betrayal of his rights and privileges as a member.

Lastly, I will point out that Standing Order 15, which governs matters of privilege, requires that these be brought forward at the earliest opportunity. I don't believe that has been the case here since the matter was subject to significant debate prior to the adoption of Motion 16 yesterday.

I would note that the members opposite made the exact same points in speaking to the motion as they are now raising in the matter of privilege. The House heard the arguments and passed the motion nonetheless.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition? House leaders?

Thank you, hon. members. As I said yesterday, this kind of matter is probably one of the most intense and sensitive issues that we may be discussing. I will be deliberating, reviewing the decisions that I've made as well as others in this House as well as other sources, and that will be brought forward after I've had an opportunity to do that.

3:00

Orders of the Day
Government Motions
Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Mr. Ceci moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate March 21: Mr. Nixon]

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. “The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people’s money.” Margaret Thatcher spoke those words in her crusade to undo the malaise and decline that took root in Britain after the Second World War. What she said can be broken down into two parts. Eventually you run out of other people’s money: the implication here is that for some time you can run on other people’s money. An economy that is already prosperous can be plundered through taxes and other forms of wealth redistribution to support a socialist program for a time. As a century of social experiments, most recently Venezuela, have demonstrated, this ends in tears.

You can also run on other people’s money for a time generationally; that is, this generation can borrow from the next generation. But when it comes to finances, the sins of the father are the sins of the son. The father who borrows money in his son’s name can enjoy short-lived prosperity for a time, but eventually he runs out of his son’s money. And the funny thing about when socialists run out of other people’s money is that they are never the ones who have to pay it back.

NDP governments in Ontario and in Manitoba and in British Columbia have run out of other people’s money, and it is always someone else who has to clean up their mess. Cleaning up this mess, the mess from virtually any NDP government in this country, is almost always painful. Right now the NDP are sowing the seeds of a debt crisis in this province that, if not wrestled under control, will see our debt levels not only become an unfair burden on future generations but have very real impact on the quality of life of Albertans very soon.

During the election the NDP placed solemn hand over heavy heart and swore to Albertans that they could be trusted with the provincial credit card. They promised Albertans that they would balance the budget by 2018, but as we know, math is hard. Whoever wrote the NDP platform had a minor billion-dollar rounding error. We were told: “But, no worry; we’ll get ’er done by 2019. It’s just a billion dollars. It’s still good.” Just months after the NDP were elected, they dropped the 2019 date and punted it to 2020 and then 2021 and then 2022 and then 2023 and then 2024.

In the 2016 budget the NDP dropped any balanced budget date altogether. They paid lip service to a theoretical concept of a balanced budget but told us to just trust them. But in this budget, 2017-18, they have abdicated all pretenses whatsoever to modest, even theoretical fiscal responsibility. They denounce now even the concept of a balanced budget as some sort of right-wing, maniacal plot to abolish government whatsoever and return mankind to a state of nature. If Thomas Hobbes was alive today, he would surely describe the NDP’s term in government as nasty, brutish, and short. But while short this government may be, our deficits will not be.

We have run deficits in Alberta since 2007, even at times when oil exceeded \$100 a barrel. No matter how high our revenues have been, our expenditures have outpaced them for a decade. And instead of moving towards a balanced budget, as the NDP promised Albertans they would, they have taken Alberta into the largest

deficit in our history, a record nominal deficit of \$10 billion last year, matched only once in our history, this year. We have gone from paid in full and money in the bank only a decade ago to a crushing debt of at least \$71 billion by the next election, and that is under the best-case scenario.

To date this government has been unreliable at best in its revenue projections. In order to contain the debt at \$71 billion – and I say: contain – by 2019, oil prices must reach at least \$68 a barrel, pipelines must not only be under construction but must be actively pumping oil to market, and GDP growth must exceed 6 per cent. All members of this House agree that each of these variables is desirable, and we hope for them, but hope is not a plan. In fact, “hope” is probably being too charitable, Mr. Speaker. “Pray” is probably a more apt term. If our prayers for this trifecta of economic growth are not answered or if the NDP exceed projected spending in any of these upcoming years, then our debt will exceed \$71 billion.

We have no good reason whatsoever to believe the NDP when they say that they can stick to a budget. This is the third NDP budget, and every single year to date they have exceeded by billions of dollars their budgeted spending limits. In fact, the Minister of Finance admitted in this House just a few weeks ago that he broke his own law, the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. He broke the law when he illegally and hypocritically spent \$1.1 billion not authorized by this Legislature. That \$1.1 billion was spent on one of the most wasteful and useless expenditures in the history of this province, the phase-out of clean-coal energy and the wiping out of several old and proud Alberta communities.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

By the time the NDP came to power, our financial accountability and responsibility legislation had already been badly watered down and damaged, but the NDP did away with them altogether and repealed outright the fiscal accountability act. In its place they introduced the aforementioned Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, an act which they are now in direct contravention of. The act originally contained a pledge from this government to never exceed a ratio of 15 per cent of debt to GDP. That 15 per cent limit was far higher than reasonable for Alberta to begin with, but the NDP pledged that this was something they would never exceed.

During estimates that year I personally questioned the Minister of Finance about this, and he solemnly pledged that he would never exceed it. When I pointed this out, that his revenue projections were too rosy and that I believed he would exceed his 15 per cent of debt to GDP, he said that I was wrong and just fearmongering. But just six months later they meekly crawled back into this Legislature to repeal their own 15 per cent debt-to-GDP debt ceiling. This government simply cannot be trusted to stick to their commitments. They simply cannot be trusted to stick to a budget.

We also warned that the reckless fiscal policy of this government would seriously jeopardize Alberta’s credit rating. Whenever we did that, however, the NDP accused us of being Chicken Little. But while the sky is not falling, our credit rating is. Just one day after the NDP repealed their already flaccid 15 per cent debt ceiling, our credit rating was downgraded. The minister did nothing, at least of substance. He did travel to Toronto to meet with credit-rating agencies and tell them that we’re still good for the money, and after meeting with him the credit-rating agencies responded by downgrading our debt even further. Such confidence the minister inspired in our lenders.

Now, less than 24 hours after the release of this budget, both Moody’s and DBRS are warning that they may yet again reduce our credit rating. When our credit rating goes down, it becomes even

more expensive to borrow money. A poor credit rating burns taxpayers' dollars uselessly. A better credit rating saves taxpayers' money and allows more dollars to actually accomplish something.

The minister needs to make our credit rating go up, but all signs of this budget point to more debt, more credit downgrades, and more taxpayers' money wasted on useless interest payments. They are reckless with taxpayers' money, they are careless with spending, they are limitless in their appetite to tax, and they are immorally jeopardizing our future by forcing our children to pay for the present.

3:10

The Finance minister is like a teenager who's just been given a brand new car and credit card by his rich mom and dad. He's quickly maxing out the credit card because he knows that someone else is going to pay for it. When families or businesses take on too much debt, there are real consequences. They themselves are responsible when the repo man comes or when creditors require significant changes to our lifestyles. They themselves must live with the consequences of financial irresponsibility. But not so politicians. When they spend other people's money irresponsibly, someone else has to live with the consequences. Taxpayers suffer as they see their tax bill go up. People who rely upon social services suffer as program spending is crowded out to pay for the increased cost of debt servicing, which in Alberta is about to reach \$2.3 billion a year, the equivalent of the departments of Energy, Justice, and Environment and Parks combined.

Everyone suffers but the politician himself, who got slapped on the back for being so generous with other people's money. The very worst that could befall that politician is that people wise up to what he's doing and vote him out of office. The very worst that could befall that politician is that after spending everyone else's money, he has to get a job outside of government when the fiscal house of cards comes crashing down, and he leaves a mess for someone else to clean up, who will have to make the tough decisions.

The problem with socialism is that eventually you run out of other people's money. We are about to run out of other people's money, people of today and people of tomorrow. Those people are demanding change now. We plead with this Finance minister and this government to take this seriously and stop the madness before the wheels fall off. But if you do not, know that this will not end with the next election but with Alberta's next government taking apart piece by piece by piece the legacy of this budget and this government.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to the 2017-18 budget. I think a lot of what we are expressing in this House is degrees of comfort with debt and degrees of comfort with borrowing and degrees of comfort with protecting public services and infrastructure. What we have seen in the past at least 20 years, since I started paying attention, is a PC government that has not kept up with either infrastructure or human services needs. In fact, it has allowed those things to slip on the basis of balancing a bottom line that doesn't recognize environmental deficits, human deficits in access to services, care, housing and health care, and doesn't recognize that liabilities related to infrastructure don't go away if you don't spend the money.

During good times and bad we faced the same challenge in the previous 20 years at least, where we were not keeping up with some

of those key elements of a civil society. We're now facing a true challenge for all of us, and I think a lot of what we're debating here is how quickly we should be moving on some of these deficits and how much we should be borrowing and indeed how we should be paying for it. The latter I'll leave to the end, but I think that's a crucial one that we still haven't come to grips with in a lot of respects.

If we have a difference of opinion on this side in the Liberal caucus, it's primarily around the pacing of change in this province and the lack of connection to what's happening on the ground and a recognition that small business is continuing to suffer. There's a recognition also that some of these new, dramatic changes, all of which I think had to be brought into place, including the carbon levy – how we can balance those things out in a thoughtful way and try to reduce the impact on everything from small business to nonprofit organizations and various services and generally low-income earners that are going to be adversely impacted by the knock-on effect of all the changes at once that are increasing the cost of living? Obviously, we can't wait for oil prices, and this is the perfect time for borrowing for infrastructure. This is a stimulus for our economy, and it's going to keep people employed. The question is how much and how we're going to pay it off.

Clearly, if we're looking at trying to both minimize our impact on future generations and budget appropriately, health care has to be a primary focus for our attention. It is by far the biggest expenditure of government, and it has grown by up to 8 per cent per year for the last decade, again leaving us in a position where the expectations are there, public expectations and professional expectations, that it's going to continue and that they're always going to have exactly what they need. The Minister of Health is in a very difficult position trying to balance the needs of people and the professional demands and the infrastructure demands, the technology demands, the growth of all these new technologies.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

But she has to make tough decisions, and I think some of the positive decisions that she's made are around the amending agreement with physicians, some of the drug cost issues that we've managed over the last few years to bring under some control. But there are a number of areas – and I'm a constant thorn in her side about prevention and early intervention and health promotion – which continue to get less and less relative to the population and cost-of-living increases.

We are gradually getting into the position where we are faced with a sickness care system. This is not a health care system anymore; it's a sickness care system. We spend virtually all of our money on managing people after they get sick and break down when there are tremendous studies showing evidence of reducing the incidence of mental illness, addictions, injuries, reducing the incidence of lifestyle diseases, heart disease, and cancer by working with families, especially high-risk families, those that often consume most of the health care system. In fact, as some of you may know, it's about 5 per cent of the population that consumes 50 per cent of our health resources because of their chronic, long-term, complicated illnesses. Many of those are seniors, but many of them simply are born with poor-functioning bodies and they need a lot of medical care in and out of hospital. If we focused more attention on some of those folks and managed them better, we would also reduce substantially some of the costs that we're dealing with.

It's disappointing not to see more significant changes in the health care system where we could substantially reduce, not tomorrow but in the years to come, the impacts on emergency departments, on EMS services, certainly on hospitalizations.

Alternate level of care beds is one that we've often talked about, spending somewhat over \$75 million a year on people that shouldn't be in hospital at all and that could be saved by getting them into long-term care. To their credit, they're building some new long-term care beds, but we're way behind the curve on that and wasting a tremendous amount of money and increasing the suffering of people because they're not where they want to be and they're not in the best place, in a hospital where they can get other infections and are often neglected at the preference of other people who are sicker.

The lack of an integrated plan for mental health. I've harangued the government on this for some time, and it's been brought to maybe a peak with the opiate crisis. We see so many different organizations doing their own thing without an integration across them all to serve people with the social services they need, the housing, understanding and communications between police and health services and social services and even the education departments and First Nations, that need to have much more thoughtful and open communication. These people come in and out and in and out and in and out, and we know what they need, but we're simply not providing them with the integrated, co-ordinated care that they need.

3:20

I've raised this week the office of the mental health advocate, who is there to deal with people who feel that they've been harmed by the health system, harmed by the mental health treatment they've received, and need an advocate for them, just as the children's advocate speaks out on issues of children in care who have not been adequately treated. With a staff of 40 he is addressing the serious issues of children in care and trying to address some of the deficits in their care. Well, the mental health advocate has two staff and has had the same number of staff since 1990.

How is it possible that we have left this advocate to wither and those patients who have just given up on the mental health system because they've never been able to get accountability from either doctors who have not properly managed them or institutions that have not recognized their rights or other services within the mental health system that have violated them in one way or another? With only a single formal review last year and no formal review of a mental health complaint in 2015, you have to know that there's a serious problem there. That is not about budget saving. That's about violating basic rights of human beings.

While I'm talking about kind of the relationship between and a more integrated approach, some of you may know about the drug courts. Drug courts keep people with mental illness, addictions out of jail.

An Hon. Member: Right place.

Dr. Swann: Yeah. Right place, right time, right people.

Calgary can manage 25 people in the drug courts. There are hundreds of people that would benefit from being diverted from jail into the community for appropriate services, rehabilitation, treatment and get them on track to lead a productive life. Instead, they're being sent to jail, which is the very worst place for people with mental illness and addiction. So the drug court needs to be substantially strengthened with finances, and that would reduce the cost on the policing system, EMS, emergency. Again, a tremendous cost savings if we can move on with that.

We have taken a position on this side that the ideal in terms of plasma for this country would be to have our own sustainable supply of blood. So far in the 50-odd years – maybe it's longer – that we've had a blood service here, we have not been able to get to

the point where we can manage more than 20 per cent of our own supply of plasma, so we're having to import it, recognizing that much of the imported blood has been from paid donors. My position is that the ideal would be to have all voluntary donors, all Canadian-made plasma and plasma products. It doesn't look like that's possible in the near term, maybe not at all, when you think about the fact that only 5 to 7 per cent of Canadians donate blood, and we need four times that much to sustain blood plus plasma products.

I've come to the position and our caucus has come to the position that, while it would be ideal, we have to start to recognize the health care system itself, the public funding for health cannot cover every possible service and product and support. In this case I'm willing to say, especially since we're importing paid plasma to the tune of 80 per cent today, that it's time for us to recognize that we will not get that in my lifetime. We need to start moving towards alternatives, ensuring that we have the best testing, the best, safest system possible and make sure that the people that we're working with have been properly screened before they're providing their donation.

The vaccination programs are still much below what they should be. We've heard from a number of the public health divisions that they're struggling with children getting only up to 60 or 70 per cent of their childhood vaccinations. We need to make those easier to get and more accessible for people. That also would reduce costs on the health care system, obviously.

I very much support the lowering of school fees and the recognition that in some cases families are not able to feed their kids appropriately because they are spending money on school fees. That's not an effective and appropriate issue. We can again find both savings and improved outcomes, but it's not clear to me whether we're borrowing for these savings. I think the challenge for us in this lowering of school fees is to recognize that there are all kinds of things that we should do, that we could do, and that we must do at some time, but piling this on top of so much other borrowing would not be, in my view, sustainable until we see a plan to repay.

I think that's part of what all of us are asking for on this side. Everything is possible with a credit card. The question is: how much are we going to start paying for ourselves? How much are we going to pass on to future generations? Will we have a heritage fund in the future? We're already down to what has been there for the last 30 years, about \$15 billion to \$16 billion. Thirty years. This is really a sad state to be in. Recognizing that oil prices have been low in the last few years, when are we going to get back to saving some of our nonrenewable resource revenue?

We do support the carbon levy, but we're not supportive of the way it's being implemented. It hasn't been clear how it's going to be disbursed. It hasn't been clear on what the limits are. There have been all kinds of promises for this carbon levy that would appear to exceed by far the \$3 billion that we're expecting to bring in. Again, it's going to stimulate different lifestyles. I think consumers and producers need to pay for our carbon emissions. There's no question that all of us are responsible for the carbon and the climate change problem. The question, I guess, is how we manage it. Preferably, in our view, the carbon levy should be revenue neutral for Albertans so they can continue to stimulate the economy with their own revenue.

Now, to be fair, the government is giving rebates to 66 per cent of Albertans. In some cases it's a little bit hard to know where that's going, especially given that it's all based on last year's tax, and people may not be here following last year. But with all due respect, it's a reasonable – in fact, I think it's too generous.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any members with questions or comments?

Seeing none, any others wishing to speak?

Ms Renaud: Madam Speaker, I'd move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 4

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Finance to move third reading of Bill 4, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, this afternoon I rise to speak in opposition to Bill 4, the supplementary supply. My colleagues and I have been talking about this government and how it has a huge spending problem, and it has for almost a couple of years now. At every opportunity in this House they have repeatedly made ideological financial decisions for the entire province that really don't make much sense. No one would be allowed to spend the way the government does with their personal budget, and if they could, it wouldn't seem rational.

3:30

We've all heard the stories of what happens to people and their belongings when they don't care and run a bit too far into a deficit, maxing out credit cards, buying homes, big-ticket items that don't fit their budget. Eventually the interest and larger payments will make it tough in lean times ahead. All of a sudden the situation becomes dire, and the purchaser has to make a decision between paying the high payments and putting food on the table. This is when many have filed for bankruptcy, lost their homes, or, worse yet, lost their marriages. Any child dependent on their parents' income, unfortunately, will suffer the consequences of the parents' financial decisions.

We've all heard about situations like this, Madam Speaker, and they are heartbreaking. Unfortunately, we may have even questioned someone who has spent large amounts of money, income that he didn't have, and tried to warn others of the dangers. We've told them because we may have worried about the repercussions that that would have on their marriage and family. Sometimes there is little one can do when they see a loved one going down this path. We may warn them, of course, about the decision, but it's in their hands. They have that ultimate decision.

I believe that my colleagues and I have been warning this government for quite some time. I know we have been warning them about the spending problem that it has. We've offered many solutions. We've recently offered a proposal that lays out a sustainable three-part plan, the 2017 Pre-budget Recommendations, that would restore this province's fiscal health by paying down the deficit and paying off the debt and providing services that Albertans deserve.

They laughed. They scoffed and jeered at us, made false accusations regarding how we would cut and slash and how it would impact front-line workers. They have told Albertans that if we were making the decisions, we would have to cut jobs and lay

off workers. Instead of looking at the problem together constructively, they somehow made the problem, that they are orchestrating, ours. I don't know how they've done it, but that's what they've done. Unfortunately, this problem will be here to stay for Albertans, and Albertans are going to say that they want us to clean up that mess because I don't think this government has any desire to clean up that mess.

We've heard them say that they would have a balanced budget by 2019. Now it's looking like '23 or '24. Madam Speaker, this government is recklessly unleashing on us a financial burden that the entire province and future generations will have to deal with for many years to come. You know, that's our children and our grandchildren that will be suffering the consequences of this debt.

Does that mean they hear our plea and caution? No, they haven't heard us. Instead of dealing with the economic crisis the rest of the province is now shouldering, they have decided to come to this House with their hands out for more. Bill 10 from last year, the Fiscal Statutes Amendment Act, 2016, was another one of those bills where they came with their hands out asking for more. In fact, the government has taken off the cap for how much can be borrowed. So there is no restraint. We're looking at \$71 billion, but will it stop there? It doesn't have to.

I believe they've heard us. I think that some of them over there may even question this supplementary supply. They're thinking about it, and they silently think to themselves, but for the sake of the ideology they continue on headstrong, without a second thought, showing little or no respect for the many Albertans that have to pick up the tab.

Madam Speaker, this government's deficit has grown to \$10.3 billion this year alone. The current fiscal year, that ends on March 31, will leave the province with a \$10.8 billion deficit, and by the time they're done their term, they will have accumulated, again, like I said, over \$70 billion in debt for Albertans to have to pay back. For this reason, I will not and I cannot support their ask for additional funds for supplementary supply.

The debt-loaded 2016-17 budget is sending the province into a series of deficits that will lead to the eventual downgrade of Alberta's credit rating. This is a situation that occurs when bond-rating agencies feel that future prospects for security have been weakened, and companies like Moody's have said that they are concerned. To support the government in this way would be extremely irresponsible, and I ask others who care about the future of this province to do the same and to oppose this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising today to speak to supplementary supply. This is not the first time this government has brought forward a supplementary supply bill unnecessarily. Many governments have done it in the past. Not all supplementary supply is wrong-headed, but it is a concept regularly abused in our legislative system.

Supplementary supply is used far too often as a means for governments to spend beyond what was budgeted at the beginning of the year. We desperately need this government to be able to live within the sums in budgets at the beginning of the year. The sums of money that it is budgeting at the beginning of the year are still recklessly high, but by the end of the year this government consistently comes in spending more, and then they come to this House and they ask forgiveness. They ask permission. It's essentially: act first and ask forgiveness later rather than asking for the authorization of this House, this Legislature, up front.

You know, if this was the first time this government came forward with a supplementary supply and it was for genuine emergencies and unforeseen expenses, perhaps we could have an easier time stomaching it. There are some commendable items in this bill, but it contains far too many extraordinary expenses for it to pass muster with the Official Opposition.

I'll start with some of the pros. There are not many pros I would normally say about this government, but there are a few positive measures in this supplementary supply for things that the Wildrose Official Opposition consider to be a priority. There are funds to support smaller class sizes. That's something that's positive. That's something that we needed to move forward on. There is funding for those affected by the 2013 floods in southern Alberta. There is long-term care and affordable supportive living funding for seniors and increased resources for the justice system.

This is something that the Member for Airdrie has spent a lot of time focusing on, that we have enough Crown prosecutors to actually meet the caseloads that come before our courts. The fact that people can commit serious crimes in this province and not even come to trial is an absolute disgrace. The Member for Airdrie, the Official Opposition shadow minister of Justice, has passionately worked on this file as has the Member for Calgary-West, the third party's Justice critic. They have passionately advocated for having enough resources for our Crown prosecutors to ensure that when people commit crimes in this province, they can actually have a court date. So that's positive.

3:40

This is very interesting. They managed to find money to reduce school fees by 25 per cent despite the government running on a commitment to abolish school fees. They ran in their campaign to abolish school fees, not cut them by 25 per cent. Now, this is a positive step in the right direction, but we have not heard from this government if they intend to go the whole way towards a hundred per cent, with 25 per cent as a step on the road to achieving that, or if the 25 per cent is just where they intend to go and maybe a hundred per cent if they find some loose change under the cushions. But loose change under the cushions they did find, and this is very interesting.

The government says that any efficiencies, any savings whatsoever found in government would be cataclysmic, that it would return us to a state of nature where mankind would live, where life would be "nasty, brutish, and short," to quote Thomas Hobbes. Finding efficiencies within government will result in some sort of libertarian dystopia if the opposition does it, but if the government manages to find any savings, well, that's just good management. You see, that is the hypocrisy of this government, Madam Speaker. That is the hypocrisy of a government that says that you can't do something when one party does it, but if another party does it, well, that's just fine. It's hypocritical in the extreme for a government to act that way.

Now, we do commend them for finding some savings. They say that they're paying for the reduction in school fees through finding efficiencies within the Department of Education. That's fantastic news. Now the government has admitted that you can find efficiencies within a department, that you can actually deliver the same services for less money, that that is at least theoretically possible. The government has now admitted that openly. I look forward to the government standing up after this. Maybe we can engage in some back-and-forth debate. I would encourage them to stand up and tell us in what other areas they think they can find savings within the government to save taxpayers' money, to deliver quality public services but at a cheaper price point. Because we know they can.

We are spending 20 per cent more per capita on the cost of government in this province than British Columbia is. That's British Columbia with a Liberal government. [interjection] By the standards of Liberals I'd say they're pretty good, though. But British Columbia with a Liberal government, Madam Speaker, who manages to provide a very high-quality level of public services but manages to do it at 20 cents less per dollar of government than Alberta. They have similar demographics to us. They have a similar standard of living. They have a similar size of population. Among our ability to compare ourselves to other jurisdictions in the country, they're probably the closest that we can compare to, yet they manage to provide government 20 cents on the dollar cheaper than Alberta does. So we know we can find savings and efficiencies within government. When the NDP say that they do it, they can do it. But when we say that we can do it, it's going to be just abolishing government, and we're going to be living in some sort of Ayn Rand nightmare.

Now, the Official Opposition has provided a detailed document on how we can get back to balance, how we can balance our budget, how we can save some money. I'm going to run members of this House through a few of those recommendations, that I hope they'll take heed of. We have proposed finding in year 1 of our fiscal plan \$2.3 billion in operational savings alone. We believe that the government should – well, I'll run through some of that \$2.3 billion, some food for thought for members of the government side. We can reduce the bureaucracy through attrition and save \$312 million every single year. Seven to 10 per cent of Alberta's bureaucrats resign or retire every single year, and we currently have an unreasonably high managers-to-workers ratio. The Official Opposition believes that there is room for government departments and AHS to do more with less. Responsibility and authority if decentralized and reallocated to the front lines and if we only hire positions for the most essential front-line jobs: we can save \$312 million every single year.

Now, when we define bureaucrats here, we are speaking about strictly the GOA, government of Alberta, employees, with exceptions for some front-line employees, those being corrections workers, Crown prosecutors. We are excluding those categories of employees when we talk about this. We're talking mostly about bona fide bureaucrats working in office towers and bureaucrats within Alberta Health Services. Within Alberta Health Services we're not talking about doctors or nurses. We're talking about people who move paper around. Many of those people are necessary. You need to have bureaucrats, but we don't need to have the number of bureaucrats that we do. By reducing the number, freezing it through attrition while allowing for essential hiring for certain positions, we can save \$312 million.

If we freeze all other wages and salaries for government employees across the government, we can also save \$210 million a year. Average weekly earnings for Albertans right now are down significantly, with unemployment rates the highest in the country. Alberta still has one of the most expensive and highly paid governments in the country, however. While the private sector suffers, the public sector has not seen any changes whatsoever. We will make it clear across the government that not one penny will go to increases for salaries until we get back to a balanced budget.

When we're going through tough times as a province, we need to do it together. All Albertans, every single one of us, needs to shoulder the burden, and it is unreasonable to expect that the private sector has to carry a hundred per cent of the burden by itself, without any help from government. Instead, right now we shelter government. We act as if we are still in boom times. We act as if oil was still \$100 a barrel. We act as if we had a balanced budget. They're living in a fantasyland where the private sector carries the

entire burden by itself. So freezing wages across the government will save us another \$210 million.

Now, perhaps one of the stupidest things done by this government was to nationalize linen services. I can't think of a more boneheaded decision that this government could take than to say that it is unreasonable for the private sector to wash and press linens, that that is an essential role of the government. You know, I believe that government should do what the private sector cannot do reasonably by itself. One thing the private sector is very capable of doing, Madam Speaker, is washing clothes, changing light bulbs. These are things that, traditionally, free men and women have been able to do pretty well on their own for the existence of human history. We've managed to change our own light bulbs, we've managed to wash our own clothes, we've managed to press our own linens, but the government has seen fit to nationalize linens for our health care system.

This is an extremely expensive measure. It's not done to provide better services for Albertans; it's done purely to increase the power of NDP union bosses. It's done purely for political reasons, to increase the muscle of the AFL to be able to bully people around and buy political power in this province. It was done for purely political reasons. They have had to pay out a significant amount of money.

We believe we can save \$60 million over 10 years if we re-privatize linen services in Alberta. How crazy is that as a phrase, to have to be able to say, "reprivatize linen services"? You know we're living in the twilight zone or an NDP government if that's something I actually have to say, that we have to reprivatize linen services in Alberta. Now, that is \$60 million over 10 years. An internal analysis from AHS lists the buyout of this program at \$200 million, a \$200 million penalty for getting rid of private linen services. So if we were to scrap this boneheaded decision, we can save taxpayers \$206 million this year alone. If there's one piece of low-hanging fruit that saves some taxpayers' money around here, that's probably it, Madam Speaker.

3:50

Now, if we were to get in year 1 from all the different spending decreases that we've listed, that would bring our overall operational expenses down, meaning we'd borrow less money, meaning that even in that first year we would save \$45 million on interest payments alone. So by borrowing less money, we're going to have more money to be able to spend on actual government services and programs.

We're going to be spending under the NDP's plan \$2.6 billion – \$2.6 billion – every single year on debt interest payments alone. That could pay for the combined departments of Justice, Energy, Environment and Parks. Combined: \$2.3 billion. Now, that's a lot of money to just completely waste.

It reminds me of, you know, when the Joker piled all of his money up in a big pyramid, and he sat at the top, and he just poured gasoline and lit it on fire. When he lit a big pyramid of money on fire, he just wanted to watch it burn. In fact, they probably got more use out of just watching the money burn than the NDP gets out of simply giving it to the banks. You know, I never thought I'd see the day when the NDP are the party of big banks, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) does come into effect. Are there any questions or comments? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker and to the whip for granting me permission to have a moment to engage on this and to say that I am shocked by the comparison between building

schools, building hospitals, maintaining public health care, public education, maintaining the current mix of private and public laundry service delivery in the province, maintaining these essential services that Albertans rely on so desperately – I am shocked at the comparison that having nurses in hospitals is the equivalent to lighting money on fire.

I am shocked by the comparison between staffing and doing the renovations, that have been long awaited, at the Strathmore hospital. For years and years and years they were promised by the previous government, and then those promises were broken. This government steps up, and we make good for the people of Strathmore-Brooks. We moved forward on the important renovations to their hospital: equated to lighting piles of money on fire, Madam Speaker.

I am shocked that the hard-working men and women who show up at those facilities to do the construction, to make sure that they're making life better for Alberta families, to make sure that they're putting food on the table for their own families are being referred to as the equivalent of lighting a pile of money on fire, Madam Speaker.

I am shocked that the commitment to build an overpass over Gaetz Avenue, a highway that many people in this Chamber drive on at least twice a week, is being seen as the equivalent of lighting a pile of money on fire, Madam Speaker.

I am shocked by the fact that the member opposite, who advocates regularly for us to spend more money in his own constituency, says that investing in communities and families throughout the province is the equivalent of lighting a pile of money on fire, Madam Speaker.

I am very disappointed that these are the kinds of remarks we're receiving from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition this afternoon. I think that the people of Alberta deserve a government that is on their side, that is continuing to build and maintain the infrastructure that was neglected for so many years, with so many failed promises in the past, Madam Speaker. Probably what I'm shocked by most is that this rhetoric shocks me because I hear it regularly. I think that we deserve a little less rhetoric, a little more reality, and a little more faith in the working men and women of this province, who work alongside every one of us every day to make life better for Alberta families.

I guess my question – no. Those are comments. I don't even have a question, Madam Speaker. That's all I have to say.

The Deputy Speaker: Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. If the Minister of Health and Deputy Premier is asking for a little less rhetoric, perhaps she'll stop referring to dirty rodents around here.

Now, the Minister of Health and Deputy Premier is deliberately misinterpreting the debate in this House. She is deliberately not understanding what we're saying, as she so often does in question period. Now, when we talk about wasted money, lighting money on fire, we're talking about interest payments. You know what taxpayers get for interest payments, Madam Speaker? Nothing. You know what Albertans get for interest payments? Nothing. Two point three billion dollars – \$2.3 billion – spent on interest payments: it only benefits one group of people, the bankers. Only the bankers benefit from this. The only people applauding this budget right now are bankers, who are rubbing their hands at the opportunity to be able to lend this government more money.

You know what? When this government talks about, you know, the dangers of payday loans, they really ought to consider their own bad borrowing habits right now. We're talking about a government that is practically a spending junkie. These guys – these guys –

cannot get their borrowing under control. They're addicted to it, and that is why under this government's fiscal plan our debt is going to climb to a record \$71 billion a year – \$71 billion a year – under best-case circumstances.

To keep it at \$71 billion and not any higher than that, oil must hit \$68 a barrel. There need to be multiple pipelines, not just under construction, not just even built but actually pumping oil to international markets at that time. To meet our revenue projections, we also need 6 per cent of GDP growth, a very handsome level of economic growth. Now, those three things, the trifecta of economic growth: I hope those things come true.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent of the House to revert to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some very honoured guests who have joined us in the gallery today. I understand that the Chinese national team for gymnastics is watching us in the galleries and observing the great traditions that we hold here in the Assembly. [Remarks in Mandarin] If they'd please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Welcome.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 4

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to this bill?

Hon. Minister of Justice, do you wish to close debate?

Ms Ganley: I close debate, Madam Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:58 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Carlier	Hinkley	Phillips
Carson	Hoffman	Piquette
Ceci	Horne	Renaud
Connolly	Kazim	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Dach	Larivee	Schreiner
Dang	Littlewood	Shepherd

Drever	Luff	Sucha
Eggen	Malkinson	Sweet
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Ganley	McLean	Westhead
Goehring	Miller	Woollard
Gray	Payne	

Against the motion:

Barnes	Fraser	Pitt
Cooper	Gill	Taylor
Ellis	Gotfried	van Dijken
Fildebrandt		

Totals: For – 38 Against – 10

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

Bill 5

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today on behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance and move third reading of Bill 5, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to oppose Bill 5, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017. You know, I realize what the function of this bill is, and it's just to be able to keep the lights on and make the operation of government be able to continue past April 1. It's not that action that I oppose. What I'm opposed to is the lack of clarity in this bill.

Bill 5 is very much like a blank cheque that the government wants us to approve. If I was to agree with this bill, which I would not, I would in essence be saying to my constituents that I explicitly understand what the money is going to be spent on. Frankly, I don't know what the money is going to be spent on explicitly. There are only six measly pages in this Bill 5. We have four of them with some numbers on them, and it doesn't really help you a lot. It doesn't explain where the money is going to be spent specifically. This is what I would say is a job that's either done too quickly or is done to hide some facts: four pages from Health, Education, Advanced Education, all the way to Treasury Board and Finance and everything in between, including my shadow Ministry of Infrastructure. There are, frankly, no explanations, and that's simply not going to cut it.

Voting on something this vague wouldn't be fair to the people that I represent. I don't think anyone would want me to agree with the handouts of their hard-earned dollars without a decent explanation. They are simply asking for a handout, something that I'm not interested in agreeing to. The interim supply, obviously, does not have any savings in it, as far as I can tell, to at least counter the bloated spending. I cannot see any budget constraints or any wisdom used in the process. Is this a continuation of last year's budget, when the government was \$10.8 billion in the hole, or is it based on this year's budget, where they're going to be \$10.3 billion in the hole by the time we're done? I don't even know which one it's based on.

Last year and now this year we seem to be going through the same exercise, where the government holds its hand out and through supplementary supply blows past the promises made in the

past. They can't seem to keep to a budget, and it's like they don't even care. I can see this government next year asking for another interim supply blank cheque just because they don't know how to keep their promises. They can't seem to rein in the spending. This government clearly has a spending problem, and my colleagues and I are not in favour of it. This so-called advance on a paycheque that provides no real details is lacking leadership. Albertans need real leadership, and sticking to a budget and being accountable with the money being spent is leadership that the Wildrose would provide.

4:20

Let's call this what it is. This is just an extension of a budget that should have been completed in a year's time. If the NDP were an employee, that would be like this NDP government basically asking for 14 months of paycheques for one year's work. Folks, that's an additional 20 per cent pay increase. I could possibly understand if this was the NDP's first budget and we knew they needed to take a bit more time to figure things out, but this is not the first budget. This is the third budget. It's the third time at the rodeo, and we haven't seen one delivered on time. Each time we have to have interim supply. Each and every time the government keeps asking for a blank cheque at the end with the interim supply. It's unbelievable.

My colleagues and I have many questions about what is contained in Bill 5, and we're being laughed at with our questions and not being taken seriously. We want to know if there will be grants that will be slid through because of lack of transparency. What will the money go towards? As a person that has run several businesses in the past, I have always wanted to know where my hard-earned money was going to go before I approved any of the bills that came across my desk. This goes against what I believe and what I suppose should be any logical businessperson's concept of running an efficient business.

I would ask the following questions, Madam Speaker, in a business transaction. What am I as a businessman buying when I'm purchasing something? How much am I paying? I suppose that with this I know how much the cost is, so I've got that one part out of here. But what am I getting in exchange for what I've just bought? What are the deliverables? What are the goods and the services? Are there satisfactory checks and balances? This is why I'm so concerned here. I don't think any of these questions, frankly, have been answered, let alone addressed.

There are too many unknowns here, and for those reasons I cannot support Bill 5. I would encourage all the members of this House to consider what I've said and vote against this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 5? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Battle River-Wainwright for his comments. I think he gave a very good overview of the Official Opposition's concerns with this bill and interim supply.

I'll focus my remarks on one area in particular, though, contained in this bill, and that is the government's breaking of their own law, the government's own Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. This act was brought in by this government themselves, when they repealed the Fiscal Responsibility Act. Now, the Fiscal Responsibility Act was introduced by Ralph Klein and Jim Dinning in the 1990s to try to prevent the kind of out-of-control, reckless spending that had taken place in the 1980s and early 1990s that led to the first debt crisis in this province. I shouldn't say the first. We had had debt crises before under Premier Aberhart. But we had been facing

a growing debt crisis in this province, a budget problem, and a large degree of unaccountability in our finances, and Ralph Klein and Jim Dinning imposed one of the strictest and most fulsome fiscal accountability laws in the country to keep government on track.

Over the last decade that piece of legislation was slowly watered down to allow for more borrowing, to allow more leniency for government to spend money that was not budgeted, and it had predictable consequences. By the time the NDP came to power, that piece of legislation had been severely weakened. But that was not good enough for the NDP; they had to outright kill it. So they repealed the Fiscal Responsibility Act in its entirety, and they replaced it with their own Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. That act included a debt ratio of 15 per cent of debt to GDP and gave the government a generous 1 per cent grace room in going over budget on operational spending. If the government spent, let's just say, 100 units on operational spending, they were allowed to go up to 1 per cent beyond that without the authorization of this Legislature. That was intended mostly for emergencies and contingencies that would be unforeseen. One per cent: that's a fairly generous amount of room.

The other major part of that bill was a debt cap of 50 per cent of debt to GDP. As I spoke of earlier, that debt cap of 50 per cent of debt to GDP lasted about six months before this government repealed their very own debt cap. They gutted that part of their own legislation because they couldn't stick to it. We warned them that that debt cap was going to be exceeded, that their revenue projections were far too optimistic, and that we expected that they would exceed their spending estimates in budgets. And, sure enough, only six months after they introduced it, they repealed their own debt cap. We warned that that would happen. They said that we were fearmongers for it, but then they did it themselves very meekly.

They didn't send out any news releases about that. They send out new releases about every positive news story that they think they can get. I must have missed it somewhere – maybe my e-mail wasn't working that day – but I didn't get the news release when the government announced that they were repealing their own debt cap. But repeal it they did. They weren't very proud of it because they didn't like to talk about it, and they still don't like to talk about it.

I would encourage the Deputy Premier or a member on the government side to rise – the Member for Calgary-Currie likes to engage in these debates with me. He's actually pretty good at this stuff. I hope he'll get up. I think he will. He's a very, very good debater. I encourage the Member for Calgary-Currie to get up and engage on this issue and explain why the government repealed their own debt cap. He should stand up and defend the interests of his constituents in this House and why it was necessary to repeal their own debt cap.

That was one part of the government's own Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act that they gutted.

Now, the other major part, as I said, was the contingency that allows the government to spend 1 per cent over their budget. Shockingly, when the government released their third-quarter fiscal and economic update, they admitted that they broke their own law. They did that because they spent \$1.1 billion – \$1.1 billion – illegally on the early shutdown of coal, to buy out these coal companies. I want to just tell those coal companies: don't cash that cheque just yet. We need to keep Hanna alive. We need to keep Forestburg alive. We're going to save these communities and undo the destructive shutdown of coal that the NDP are doing right now.

The shutdown of coal is not just bad for those communities, trying to wipe them off the map, and it's not just bad for electricity prices in Alberta. It's also bad for taxpayers because taxpayers have to pony up \$1.1 billion for the early shutdown of coal. That is

money that is completely wasted. We may as well have just had a nice bonfire with it. At least, we could have heated the place without paying the carbon tax for a while. Instead, the government decided to spend \$1.1 billion for the early phase-out of coal.

4:30

Now, that's not where it ends. That money was spent illegally. Illegally spent money. When normal people break the law, there's normally a consequence. If you speed and you get a ticket, you pay a fine. If a member across were to be very upset with me and hit me, they would get charged with assault, and there would be a criminal offence. There are consequences for breaking laws for normal people. But when politicians break their own laws, you know what the consequences are? Nothing. Nothing, Madam Speaker, when they break their own laws. All they had to do was admit that they broke their own laws, and the Finance minister under questioning did in fact admit that he broke his own laws. It's essentially like – you know, I figured out a trick when I was little kid that if my parents caught me doing something that I wasn't supposed to be doing, I would get in trouble, but if I did something bad and I just went and told them that I did it, at least for a few times I figured out that my parents would say: "I'm very glad you were honest with me, son. You're not going to be in trouble."

That's what the NDP have figured out here. They can break the law. They can break their own laws that they wrote and they passed. They can break their own laws and just say: well, I'm sorry, Albertans, that we broke the law, but I hope you'll be happy that we've been forthright with you that we broke that law. But they didn't send out a news release saying it because they weren't very proud of it. They put it in small print at the bottom of the third-quarter fiscal update, that they are in technical violation of the law. Well, a technical violation of the law is still a violation of the law, and it's not merely technical. They broke it because they spent \$1.1 billion without the authority of this Legislature.

Now, the reason we have a Legislature right now in Alberta is the long parliamentary tradition of Westminster coming from England, which goes back over 500 years, and the fight between Parliament and King for control of the budget. You know, England fought civil wars over the right of Parliament to have ultimate spending authority, that the king, essentially the executive and cabinet, could not spend money without the direct authorization of Parliament. That is the very fundamental, most important role of Parliament, of Legislatures, that the government is not allowed to spend money not authorized by Parliament, and that is what this government has done. They have spent money not authorized by Parliament and not just some loose change found in the couch: \$1.1 billion. For that \$1.1 billion we get absolutely nothing in return. It's completely wasted money.

This is a disrespect of this Legislature. It is a disrespect of the history of this institution of a Westminster parliament that we have the sole discretion to authorize the government, the Crown, the cabinet acting on behalf of the Crown to spend public monies. They have done it without the authorization of this House. It is completely disrespectful to every member of this House that they would spend money without its authorization, and it is disrespectful to the traditions of this place and the traditions that came before us in Westminster.

Mr. Cooper: Haven't they been found in contempt over this?

Mr. Fildebrandt: This government has been found in contempt of this Legislature. They may actually be the only government ever found in contempt of this Legislature, Madam Speaker. Hopefully, they will be the last. It may be one of several times that they are

found because they are acting illegally. They are breaking their own laws. We need at least one member of the government on the other side to stand up and explain clearly why they broke the law, why they saw it necessary to go around traditions that go back half a millennium, that are the very foundation of this institution, that gives parliament the unquestioned, supreme right to authorize spending for government. The government is not parliament. Those are two technically different things.

I would encourage the Deputy Premier or, even better, the Member for Calgary-Currie . . .

Ms Hoffman: Better?

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm sorry, Deputy Premier. We haven't really got into it yet. The Member for Calgary-Currie and I have a bit of a tradition. Every year the Member for Calgary-Currie and I normally put a little money on the table to bet about how the budget is going to work out. You know, I've found that the Member for Calgary-Currie is a very healthy supplement to my salary. I have found our relationship to be most profitable and most enjoyable. He is an excellent debater. You know, I'll make a bet with him right now. I'm going to bet that the government is projecting a \$71 billion debt by fiscal year 2019-20. I'll bet him 20 bucks right now, with 2 to 1 odds. I'll give him 2 to 1 odds that that debt will be bigger than \$71 billion by the time that fiscal year concludes.

I'll close my debate on that.

An Hon. Member: Can I bet?

Mr. Fildebrandt: It's a standing offer to anyone who wants to take it, but it's particularly offered to the Member for Calgary-Currie, and if the Deputy Premier feels a little left out from that, I will offer her 2 to 1 odds as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Any other speakers to the bill under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cooper: Right after 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Go ahead, then, hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Cooper: It's okay. It's Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and I actually only rise to request unanimous consent of the House to go to one-minute bells, please.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Next speaker to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question? The hon. minister to close debate.

Ms Ganley: So closed, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice on behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance has moved third reading of Bill 5, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:37 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Carlier	Hoffman	Phillips
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Ceci	Kazim	Renaud
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Dach	Larivee	Sabir
Dang	Littlewood	Schreiner
Drever	Luff	Shepherd
Eggen	Malkinson	Sucha
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet
Ganley	McLean	Turner
Goehring	Miller	Westhead
Gray	Payne	Woollard
Hinkley		

4:40

Against the motion:

Barnes	Gill	Swann
Cooper	Gotfried	Taylor
Ellis	Pitt	van Dijken
Fildebrandt		

Totals: For – 37 Against – 10

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 2 An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I look forward to tabling an amendment that I've raised privately with the minister and I hope will be favourable to just adding the scope to the bill and clarity to the bill.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. I very much support the intent of this bill. I am slightly concerned that its protections may not be afforded to all survivors due to a technicality. Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence, currently covers survivors who are either a minor, in an intimate relationship with or dependent on the perpetrator at the time that the sexual misconduct or nonsexual assault occurred. It is the term "dependency" that concerns me.

A relationship with dependency might not be an accurate description of incidents where the survivor and the perpetrators are co-workers with the same level of seniority such as the recent high-profile case of female police officers who were affected in the Calgary Police Service after enduring years of harassment from colleagues. It's not clear if dependency applies to harassment or

exploitation of an adult student by a university professor or a postsecondary instructor. It's unfortunate that the specific mention of co-workers was left out as it would give confidence, I think, and encourage people to come forward. Even though it may be implied, it's not explicit.

The bill cannot be amended at this time to include references to co-workers since that would involve altering the legislation, which is not under current consideration.

Consequently, I would like to propose an amendment aimed at reducing the bill's ambiguity by inserting an additional category of protection. I have the appropriate number of copies as circulated, and my amendment reads as follows. I move that Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence, be amended in section 3 in the proposed section 3.1(1) as follows: in clause (b) by striking out "or" at the end of subclause (ii), by adding "or" at the end of subclause (iii), and by adding the following after subclause (iii):

(iv) the person who committed the misconduct was in a position of trust or authority in relation to the person with the claim.

The second part, (b), in clause (c) by striking out "or" at the end of subclause (ii), by adding "or" at the end of subclause (iii), and by adding the following subclause (iv):

(iv) the person who committed the assault or battery was in a position of trust or authority in relation to the person with the claim.

Essentially, the amendment seeks to amend Bill 2 to ensure that its protections apply to a broader category of survivors; namely, that the person who committed the misconduct was in the position of trust or authority in relation to the person with the claim. A "position of trust or authority" is admittedly a general term, and that's exactly the point. My amendment seeks to ensure these limitations apply to a broader category of survivors.

Unfortunately, short of rewriting the entire proposed section 3.1, which I'm sure the government members would not support, my amendment cannot capture everything in terms of eliminating the limitation period for sexual harassment claims. Instead, it builds on the bill's original wording but doesn't radically alter it. Since the sexual misconduct section deals primarily with power differentials, this proposed bill is in line with the government's intent. Regrettably, it will not include situations where workplace sexual harassment occurs among relative equals, such as the situation in Calgary that I mentioned.

Again, I hope the government would consider bringing forward further legislation that would deal explicitly with workplace sexual harassment, but for now the government may wish to argue that what my amendment seeks to accomplish is already covered by subclause (iii), which deals with situations of dependency, as in financial, emotional, physical, or otherwise. However, this is far from certain in cases of workplace dynamics or adult educational settings, and I think we owe it to survivors to be as inclusive as possible.

I call on my colleagues to support the amendment to ensure that more survivors feel included under these important protections and will more readily come forward.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise to speak against the amendment in this case. We were very clear in selecting incredibly broad and inclusive language. This, in fact, puts Alberta, which was behind every other province in the country, out in front so that we have the most inclusive language of any province. As

I've said several times, this will include sexual assault as well as sexual misconduct and assault in certain relationships.

The relationship that the member mentions, one of dependence, is quite broadly drafted. It includes financial dependence, emotional dependence, and it would definitely cover what he is proposing. I think we're pretty confident that the language we have chosen is inclusive of the same people that the member's amendment would include. We're confident that we'll be removing barriers for survivors of sexual and domestic violence and that we will be ahead compared to any other jurisdiction.

Because the amendment proposed is covered by the language in our act, there's some concern that accepting the amendment would create additional confusion for the courts. Courts have specific rules around if you've already included something and then you include a second provision trying to include a subset of the first thing you've included. It creates unnecessary confusion and can result in people that you didn't intend to exclude being excluded.

Madam Chair, I think it is important that we stick with the broad and inclusive language that we already have. I think that is pretty much all I have to say about that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? Seeing none, I'll call the question:

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll just speak briefly and generally to the bill. I'm pleased to be able to speak to this, and I want to thank my colleagues on all sides of the House for being willing to support this bill.

It proposes amendments to the Limitations Act that would help survivors of sexual and domestic violence by allowing them the time they need to come forward and file a civil claim. Right now in Alberta, Madam Chair, as I've mentioned, if a person wants to sue for this type of assault, the action must be started within two years of the person knowing about the incident. There are provisions in the current legislation that suspend the limitation period in certain circumstances such as those involving minors and fraudulent concealment or disability, but we know that many survivors need more time.

4:50

It's time to do more to help protect those who have experienced sexual and domestic violence. As I just referenced, Bill 2 would remove the limitation period for sexual assault or other sexual misconduct and nonsexual assault involving a minor, intimate relationship, or a dependant. We recognize that survivors of sexual and domestic violence have a difficult journey ahead, and sometimes the decision to come forward can be exceptionally personal. Each survivor will have their own journey. Removing the limitation period empowers survivors to come forward on their own terms when they are ready.

Madam Chair, this is the message we received when we introduced the bill. Organizations that work with survivors told us that this opens one more door for survivors to come forward and provides one more option for a survivor's journey. This change in legislation gives survivors time to heal and allows them to hold perpetrators to account if and when they choose. The same message is what prompted us to draft the legislation in the first place. This is a change that Albertans have asked for, and we know it's the right thing to do.

Madam Chair, I'll just speak very briefly to the term "sexual misconduct." Removing the limitation period for claims stemming from sexual misconduct in intimate relationships would increase recourse for people who have endured a broad range of unwelcome behaviours. These behaviours would include but are not limited to sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, voyeurism, or distributing sexually explicit photographs or videos without an individual's consent.

The provisions of the bill would apply retroactively, meaning that it would allow claims that stem from incidents which predate its coming into force. Applying these changes retroactively is consistent with other jurisdictions and aligns with the purpose of the bill, which is to recognize that survivors of sexual and domestic violence may need more time to come forward and no survivor should be limited by a legal deadline.

During second reading we heard from many of my colleagues who were brave enough to speak about their own experiences. I want to thank them for their courage. These many individual experiences highlight how each survivor has their own journey. They also illustrate how tragically prevalent these crimes are. I hope they will remind survivors out there that they are never alone. I would also like to thank the many agencies that work to support survivors on these journeys.

Madam Chair, every Albertan deserves to feel safe and respected in their communities, homes, and workplaces. One in 3 women and 1 in 6 men will experience sexual violence in their lifetime. We hope that this bill will make their lives a little bit better. I'm gratified by the support this bill has received so far, and I look forward to further discussion.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment I would like to pass out.

The Chair: This will be amendment A2.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to introduce a very simple and clear amendment to extend the protection provided by this very important bill. I remember that we heard the personal and very touching statements by members on both sides of the House last week, you know, and it made me think: how can we work together in collaboration to make this bill stronger to help Albertans? The bill before us now removes the time limit to file an action for victims of sexual misconduct and domestic violence for three groups, which are minors, persons in an intimate relationship, and dependants.

This amendment adds protection for a fourth group; that is, disabled persons. This amendment recognizes that those vulnerable Albertans would also benefit from additional time to file a civil action against those who perpetuate sexual misconduct or domestic violence. Madam Chair, the existing Limitations Act pauses the clock for persons under disability for the period when they're disabled, but we should ensure that all individuals who are victimized when they are disabled or victims who later become disabled, perhaps due to the misconduct or domestic violence itself, have full opportunity to this act.

This amendment would change section 3 of the current bill. I would move that Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence, be amended in section 3, in the proposed section 3.1(1), as follows, that (a) in clause (b) by striking out "or" at the end of subclause (ii), by adding "or" at the end of subclause (iii), and by adding the following after subclause (iii):

(iv) the person with the claim was a person under disability. And the second part, (b), in clause (c) by striking out “or” at the end of subclause (ii), by adding “or” to the end of subclause (iii), and by adding the following after subclause (iii):

(iv) the person with the claim was a person under disability.

I hope that all members of this House see why this simple amendment to this bill can go a long way to protecting a person with a disability. I want to congratulate the hon. Minister of Justice for drafting this bill and working very hard, especially working with all the different agencies to protect vulnerable Albertans. I think that by adding this fourth group it would strengthen this bill, and I hope all members of this House would support this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Connolly: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I’d like to thank the member for this amendment. I’d also like to thank the member for working very closely with our government and with the Minister of Justice and her office as well to create this amendment, which, in our view, really does help in a way. The way the bill is worded now, chances are that this situation would be already under the bill. However, it really more kind of brings it all in if the individual comes out of a guardianship situation, for instance. As it sits right now, it does already help those who are under guardianship or have someone above them if they are being attacked by that person.

I’d really like to thank the member for this amendment. I’d suggest that all members of the Assembly vote for this amendment.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. It’s a pleasure to rise and speak in favour of amendment A2 by my colleague from the third party. I’d just like to thank him for that. I would also just like to extend some thanks to the government side. It’s always nice when we can see a good idea for a good idea and that the source of that idea isn’t necessarily a stumbling block to good governance. When the government does the right thing, I’m not afraid to acknowledge that and say thank you.

I’ll be encouraging all of my colleagues on this side of the House to support this. It’s important in this process of supporting Bill 2, supporting those who are victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence, that we do everything that we can to ensure that all who need to be protected are protected, certainly if only in clarifying the legislation, which I think is our responsibility, to have the best piece of legislation the first to pass this Legislature as opposed to having to come back and create clarity in the future.

I appreciate the amendment. I look forward to supporting it and thank the government for doing the same.

5:00

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

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak in support of my hon. colleague’s amendment to Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. Bill 2 is an exceptional piece of legislation which I’m sure will garner support from all sides of this House, and I’m very pleased to note that that appears to be the case. Further, the debate around this bill has been very emotional, and I’ve been inspired by the strength of many members who have chosen to share their personal experiences, under, I’m sure, very difficult circumstances to do so, with sexual and domestic violence.

Madam Chair, these crimes are repugnant, and I feel this debate was strengthened and grounded by these personal stories. I’d like to share as well that I have someone close to me who also suffered abuse in the past and had, you know, a brave opportunity to come forward with that, but it would have not been allowed under this previous legislation. My wife’s family also has a cousin who is physically disabled and living in affordable housing, supported by AISH. It is a very mixed residence, and there are people there that have had many different challenges in their lives before, and we worry about her safety because of her naïveté and some of the protected environment that she’s grown up in. She’s 63 years old but is in a position of vulnerability, I would say, in many cases, and we worry about her and watch closely over her. It’s very heart-warming for me to see the acceptance of an amendment here, again, where we have the opportunity to strengthen legislation through collaboration and co-operation. I think that’s a very positive thing.

Any additional avenues for justice, whether they be civil or criminal, that we can provide to victims of these horrific acts is something we should all support. That’s why I’m proud to support this amendment from the Member for Calgary-Greenway and to thank him for his thoughtfulness in bringing this forward. Persons living with a disability are often very reliant on those who help care for them, whether that be a health care or community supports professional, friend, or family member. As repulsive, Madam Chair, as this may seem, it is often these people, that are close to the victims, in positions of power that sometimes use this reliance and their vulnerability to perpetrate sexual and physical abuse. This abuse can often continue without being reported because of their vulnerability and of the power that a caregiver or worker, that is ostensibly supporting them and providing services to them as a disabled individual over time, especially if that individual has a diminished mental or even physical capacity that may mean that they are further dependent.

By extending the indefinite timeline to disabled Albertans who wish to file a civil claim when they are victims of domestic or sexual violence, we’re ensuring that this vulnerable group has additional avenues to seek civil justice and restitution without limitations to time, which I think is extremely important because sometimes people take time to come grips with their ability to have the strength to come forward and challenge those who have perpetrated this on them.

In closing, I feel that this is a friendly amendment. I applaud the Member for Calgary-Greenway and the Minister of Justice for working closely and collaborating on this. This bill is for all Albertans. My understanding is that the minister has been well consulted and included in the development of this amendment as well, and I’m glad to hear some members of the other side also speaking in favour of this.

For these reasons, I will be supporting this amendment, and I encourage all members of this House to do the same. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I’ll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 2? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Madam Chair. I’m just so happy to stand here today and support Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. Back in 2015 my private member’s bill, Bill 204, Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015, passed in

this House unanimously. The reason I chose to do my private member's bill on helping victims of domestic violence is because I'm passionate on ending violence against women and girls. In preparing that bill, I spoke to dozens of survivors as well as people who work with them. I heard wrenching stories as well as stories of hope, but one thing that came through in every single one was that people do not and cannot come forward until they are ready. But today Alberta law doesn't fully recognize that fact. Instead, the Limitations Act creates barriers for women and victims, for anyone who endured sexual or domestic assault. It sets an artificial calendar with a strict two-year deadline. It is out of touch with the reality that so many face.

In fact, it saddens me to say that Alberta has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in Canada. I hope that we can all agree that Alberta's laws should protect people from sexual assault and domestic violence, but now the Limitations Act protects not those who suffer from those assaults but their attackers. A civil suit is more than just restitution, even though that restitution can be important. It's about accountability, and it can be about closure. We want our civil justice system in Alberta to support people in their healing, not to turn them away because that healing hasn't happened quickly enough. Thinking back to my consultations for my private member's bill, there were words that came up again and again – dignity, respect, and compassion – things everyone deserves to find in our justice system and nobody more so than people who have survived sexual assault or intimate partner violence.

Let's talk for a moment about domestic violence. For many women who are in abusive relationships, it can be hard to leave an abusive partner, and statistics say that it can take up to seven times for someone to leave their abusive partner. It can also be really hard to report this violence, let alone take that partner to court, especially if the alternative is homelessness or poverty. For immigrant women or women facing other issues, the obstacles can be even more daunting. For them to finally find the courage and the resources to leave and then come forward is a momentous step, and it can be empowering. It can be a tremendous relief, but it's often very difficult.

It's also important to note that violence doesn't discriminate. It can affect everyone and anyone, but the reality is that women are far more targeted, and this includes trans women, disabled women, women of colour, and women of all faiths. The last thing our justice system should tell them is: sorry; time is up.

I would like to take a moment to talk about a staggering reality for many indigenous women. Indigenous women face life-threatening gender-based violence and disproportionately experience violent crimes because of hatred and racism. By better understanding the severity of these issues, we can better work towards breaking down the cycle of violence. Statistics Canada reported that indigenous women are more likely to experience more severe and potentially life-threatening forms of domestic and family violence than nonindigenous women. For example, 54 per cent of indigenous women reported severe forms of family violence such as being beaten, being choked, having a gun or knife used against them, or being sexually assaulted versus 37 per cent of nonindigenous women. Indigenous women 15 years and older are three to five times more likely to experience violence than nonindigenous women, and rates of spousal assault against indigenous women are more than three times higher than those against nonindigenous women.

In Calgary alone there are 16,000 domestic calls and complaints every year. That doesn't count the women who will never report it, who will endure pain and violence in fear and silence.

5:10

Let me say this, Madam Chair. Apart from a bill's legal impact, conversations that help to reduce stigma encourage more people to come forward. They want to tell Albertans everywhere: if you know of violence – sorry. I just want to say that throughout my consultation something that came up over and over again was that if someone was witnessing violence, it is important to report it. If you are the person who is experiencing violence, it is so important to report it because it can be the difference between life or death. I know that it is a scary thing to report violence, but if it's someone you love or even if it's someone you don't know, you could save their life. I just wanted to put that on record.

One person sharing their story can make a difference for hundreds, even thousands of people. I focused on domestic violence, but that applies to sexual assault just as much, which is why I've been so moved by my colleagues who have come forward in this debate to tell their own stories of survival. I hope that they know what it's meant for survivors of assault across Alberta and beyond. Maybe that's how this bill will have its most important impact. Yes, the changes we're making will help people seek the restitution they deserve. This bill will hold the perpetrators of assault responsible not only criminally but for the human impact of their crimes. More than all of that, it will make it possible for many more people to come forward through the legal system and tell their stories, and not just from this point forward. By making these changes retroactive, we're saying that nobody's stories should be erased by time and that no perpetrator of assault should be able to hide behind the calendar of years gone by.

We're ensuring that survivors can sue to recoup the cost of pain and suffering and also the very tangible costs of everything from lost wages to counselling. This bill tells every Albertan who has faced this kind of violence: we stand with you and we have your back. I'm so proud to be part of a government that has this as a priority. Albertans have waited for too long for this change to come, and I'm proud that it's our government that has finally taken this action, that's been needed for far too long.

This issue is very close to my heart – as many of you know, my sister was recently murdered, and I wish that she would have had this chance – and the hearts of everyone who has experienced this kind of violence in their lives. I want to thank the Solicitor General and the cosponsors for bringing this piece of legislation forward, and I encourage everyone to vote for it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise today in support of Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence, and it was a privilege to join our Minister of Justice and Solicitor General along with the Minister of Status of Women for the announcement of Bill 2 at the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton in my community of Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Over the last two years I've had the incredible honour of building a relationship with SACE. Through this relationship I've been given the opportunity to learn so much from those who work in the community to assist and support survivors of sexual violence here in Alberta. This experience has taught me to examine my own myths and assumptions about sexual violence. Sexual assault is not barred by income level, gender, ability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture, or spiritual belief. Anyone can be affected, so sexual and domestic violence is an issue that affects all Albertans.

There are many false beliefs regarding sexual violence, but by definition, in the simplest terms it is any forced sexual contact without the expressed and voluntary consent of the receiving individual. Sexual assault is a crime, and at its foundation it is an act of power and control. Therefore, as responders, if our goal is to dismantle the systems that hinder survivors, we must approach the issue through these same terms. What power do we have as a government to empower and support survivors? How can we remove barriers to ensure that survivors are able to come forward on their own terms?

I stand in support of the proposed amendments to the Limitations Act to remove the existing limitation period for civil actions for sexual assault; for misconduct of a sexual nature for dependants, minors, and those in intimate relationships; and for nonsexual assault for dependants, minors, and those in intimate relationships. It is our duty as legislators and representatives of all Albertans to provide individuals with the best possible opportunities for success and empowerment by creating safe spaces. We can do this as a government by eliminating barriers and making the legal system more accessible.

It is my belief that every Albertan has the right to feel safe, protected, and respected in their communities, and this should be reflected in our legislation. Currently all common-law jurisdictions across Canada, excluding only Alberta and P.E.I., have removed or amended the limitations period for sexual assault cases. It is time that Alberta catch up with the other provinces of Canada and demonstrate our support for the dignity of survivors of sexual and domestic violence by amending the Limitations Act. Supporting this amendment would put Alberta ahead of what other provinces have currently enacted by eliminating deadlines for people who are victims of family violence, minors, dependants, and intimate partners.

Overcoming sexual and domestic violence is a uniquely private, exceedingly difficult, and deeply personal experience, and it affects each survivor differently. By removing arbitrary timelines for reporting, we place the power back in the hands of the individual and recognize that each survivor will take a different path to healing. Furthermore, having a limitation on reporting only helps to perpetuate myths around the statistics and prevalence of sexual violence in Alberta. Cultural attitudes enforced by false myths and ideas around sexual violence enable those who are the abusers, thereby creating a social environment where survivors are silenced and criticized for what someone else has done to them. We need to respect that it may take time for survivors to come forward about their experiences. We need to support survivors by opening doors for empowerment, not closing them.

I want to thank everyone in this Assembly who has so far shown support for this bill, especially those members who have stood up and shared their own stories of sexual and domestic violence. I am so proud to stand with you in this House, and I know that Albertans are watching and so proud, and I know that it will help them along their own journeys. Thank you very much.

Finally, I would also like to thank Mary Jane James and the entire board of the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton as well as the

Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, the YWCA, and everyone else in our province who works to support survivors of domestic and sexual assault every day.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise. I'd just like to very briefly rise and thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for her kind and passionate words on this very important issue. It was a pleasure to see her back in the House earlier this week. On behalf of all of our colleagues here on this side of the House and, certainly, the Wildrose caucus I'd like to pass along our condolences. She has been in our thoughts and prayers, and it's just wonderful to have her back.

5:20

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

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mr. Westhead: I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 2. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Considering the significant progress we've made today, I rise to request unanimous consent of the House to adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]

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