



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 14, 2017

Day 53

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (NDP)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (NDP)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (NDP),
Government Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (UCP)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UCP)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (NDP)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (Ind)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (NDP)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (Ind)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (UCP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (UCP)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (NDP)
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Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (NDP)
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Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (NDP)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
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Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
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Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 14, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Hon. members, please join me in the singing of *O Canada*, our national anthem, led by Mr. Robert Clark, in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly your daughter Nicoelle Wanner; her husband, Tyler Wiens; and their three children – Zachary, Marinn, and Gibson – who are visiting us today from Medicine Hat. Zachary Wanner Wiens is 11 years old and in grade 5 at l'école St. Thomas Aquin. Zachary enjoys playing hockey, is an avid follower of all sports, and is a big fan of the Beatles. Me, too. Marinn Wanner Wiens is nine years old and in grade 3 at l'école St. Thomas Aquin. Marinn is an avid follower of fashion, has a talent for sewing, and enjoys swimming. Gibson Cole Wanner Wiens is five years old and in kindergarten. Gibson's favourite pastimes include breakdancing and building with Lego. He recently lost his first tooth. Grandpa, you've got to come through on that one. Tyler Wiens works as an agricultural lender for Farm Credit Canada. He coaches kids' baseball and hockey and plays rec hockey. Nicoelle Wanner is a family physician with an interest in mental health advocacy, pediatrics, and lifestyle. The family and your wife, Mrs. Joan Emard-Wanner, are all seated in your gallery. I would ask them now to all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you. Nice to have you here.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a local, passionate United Conservative Party supporter and director of the interim joint board, Miss Natalie Pon. Some of you may recognize Natalie. She was the driver for updating the Conservative Party of Canada's policy declaration to be LGBTQ-plus inclusive and cospearheaded the change for the federal Conservatives to recognize marriage equality. I would ask Natalie to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Transportation and Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly six volunteers from Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Their efforts at public education and advocacy have saved lives and reduced injuries from impaired driving. They are Brenda Johnson, chair of the National Board of Directors; Denise Dubyk; Amanda Sawatzky; Susan Semotiuk; Gillian Phillips; and Darlene Urquhart. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Mason: As I said, Mr. Speaker, I have two introductions today.

The Speaker: I'm sorry.

Mr. Mason: I have two guests from the Alberta Motor Transport Association. The AMTA represents all sectors of the highway transportation industry. They are valuable partners in promoting high standards of safety and compliance for safety of the public in the transportation industry. It's my pleasure to introduce Dan Duckering, the past chair of the AMTA board of directors, and Chris Nash, the vice-chair. I would ask them to also please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Now Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Executive Director Donna Oberik and members of the Canadian Injured Workers Association of Alberta. The association provides a voice for injured workers and works tirelessly representing the needs and interests of injured workers. I would now ask all my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it's my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a family from the great district of Whitecourt-St. Anne. Two weeks ago I was pleased to announce on behalf of the hon. Brian Mason, Minister of Transportation, much-needed safety improvements, including traffic lights, better lighting, improved highway signage, and widened turn lanes, at the intersection of highways 43 and 22. The Walsh family of Mayerthorpe lost their loving father, Patrick, to an accident that took place at that dangerous intersection in 2013. They have been advocating for improved safety at that intersection, and our government took action. I would like to ask Ann Walsh, her daughter Kate, and son Mike Walsh to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Kristine Ritchie. Kristine is a bachelor of social work student from the University of Calgary, central and northern Alberta region, the faculty that I used to be an instructor of just before I was elected, and she is currently doing her field placement in my office. She's a certified crisis worker at the Canadian Mental Health Association and is a passionate advocate for helping vulnerable Albertans. She's also one of my constituents,

so I'm very pleased about that, too. I'd ask Kristine to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce three long-time residents of the beautiful constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. These three tenacious women are founding members and directors of the Old Glenora Conservation Association. The association is committed to maintaining the integrity of the community by keeping its history of over 100 years alive and its built heritage intact for the benefit of present and future generations. I'd invite Margaret Robinson, Barbara Finlay, and Lynn Odynski, seated in the members' gallery, to please rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other introductions today?

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jeff Nesbitt of the Canadian Men's Health Foundation and Michael Solberg of Global Public Affairs. Jeff is in town holding meetings to talk about the importance of men leading healthier lives. I look forward to speaking with both of them this afternoon. I'd ask them both to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

1:40

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my good friend Arundee Singh Sandhu, a small-business owner in southeast Edmonton, a long-time PC Party volunteer who campaigned for Conservative MLAs in Alberta, believe me, for almost 20 years – I'm sure that he must have started when he was two or three – past PC Youth and PC Alberta executive, and my friend. I have literally known him since he was almost this height. I'll ask him to rise and get the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Bullying Awareness Week

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in honour of Bullying Awareness Week. I spent this morning with a wonderful and engaged group of grade 6 students at Richard Secord school. I was fortunate to be able to listen in as they talked about what they think bullying is and how we can work together to make schools safer and more inclusive.

No parent wants to see their child witness or experience bullying, but when I asked how many students had witnessed bullying and how many know what to do to stop it, most of them raised their hands. It was heartbreaking to see so many young people who have seen or experienced bullying first-hand, but it was also inspiring to know that young people are aware and are working together to stand up to bullies.

As we all know, bullying can take place anywhere: in schools, at work, or at home. Bullying hurts everyone. It makes people feel isolated and alone and can have a significant and lasting impact on someone's life. So this week and indeed all year round we are

asking Albertans to stand up for those who are bullied and to watch out for each other to ensure that our homes, schools, workplaces, and communities are safe and healthy.

Our government is taking action by providing resources to enable Albertans to help someone else and support those who are suffering. Our family and community safety program has supported healthy relationships and antibullying projects across this province. Our \$25 million increase to family and community support services programs is helping build strong and resilient communities, and our 24-hour bullying helpline is available to those who need someone to talk to. We also have resources available across our partnering ministries and through the Alberta Human Rights Commission, and we are working with our community partners to promote respect and inclusion and to help everyone in our communities know what they can do.

We must do all we can to ensure that all Albertans but especially those who are at risk of greater marginalization and discrimination have safe, caring, and welcoming environments. We know that bullying can come in many different forms. When I listened to students today, it reaffirmed my belief about why GSAs are so important. Our young people must feel proud of who they are, and they deserve a safe and respectful environment to be who they are. Our fight to ensure that students can form or join a GSA without fear of retribution from peers, teachers, or parents is about reassuring them that they are free to be themselves on their own terms and in their own time.

We know that there is much more work to be done to realize our vision of a bully-free Alberta, an Alberta where everyone feels safe and welcome in their schools, communities, and workplaces. This week is an important reminder that it takes all of us to build safe and healthy communities. For those of us here in the Legislature, it means setting an example of what it means to differ in opinions and beliefs but to do so in a respectful manner. We are all no strangers to lively debate, but I call on all of us to ensure that we speak to each other in a way that sets an example for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very grateful to rise and speak about Bullying Awareness Week. I applaud the minister of human services for having events throughout the year to promote awareness about bullying. Our schools and workplaces need to be healthy and respectful places for all to allow us to grow. How can our children learn to trust and build healthy relationships if bullies break those trusts? It is critical to have healthy and respectful relationships. All of us and all of our children deserve that.

Bullying causes poor mental health outcomes, which can manifest into physical health issues. This causes school and workplace productivity issues, absenteeism, a drain on the health care system, and for matters that are one hundred per cent preventable.

This year's stand up is a call to stand up against bullying. If you are bullied, resources are available at Alberta human services, and the number for that is 1.888.456.2323. It is open 24/7. There is also an online chat at the human services website for children and teens facing bullying. That number: 1.800.668.6868. No one – no one – should have to go to work or school and face bullying.

In the Legislature we can disagree without being disagreeable. Bullying, threats, and intimidation do not work in the Legislature, and they should not work in schools or in the workplace. Let us all stand up and stop it now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was not informed that others wanted to respond today, but I will still ask for unanimous consent of the House to allow the leader of the Alberta Party to respond to the ministerial statement.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to rise this afternoon to speak in honour of Bullying Awareness Week, an initiative that aspires to promote awareness about bullying. Across the province many young people are intimidated and ostracized at school and in their communities. On the playground, after school, in the hallways, and in the home bullying is endemic to our society and can cause depression and anxiety, sadness, and loneliness. We all can do more to build resilience to bullying and to make sure that no young person experiences the hardship and isolation that can come from it.

Something many kids today have to deal with is online bullying. The statistics and the numbers are concerning, with 2 in 5 parents reporting that their child has been involved in a cyberbullying incident. Social media is becoming an increasing presence in our lives and in the lives of our young people. Bullying Awareness Week should not only be about physical or verbal intimidation but digital aggression as well. If we want to make a real difference in ending bullying, we can call bullies on their behaviour, support those who've been bullied, and model what healthy relationships can look like. I ask all members of this House to be aware of all forms of bullying and to take action when you can.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Keystone XL Pipeline Project

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we learned yesterday that the Nebraska Public Service Commission will decide on Monday whether to approve the proposed route for the Keystone XL pipeline. Sadly, we know that many of the NDP's friends, including current NDP caucus members, have been diligently working for years to kill off Keystone XL, working to kill off any and all other export opportunities for Alberta's oil. Can the Premier inform this House what the NDP government has done to argue the merits of Keystone XL before the Nebraska regulatory body?

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our government is glad to see progress on the Keystone XL pipeline project, which we know will help create jobs here in Alberta by allowing for our product to be shipped with less expense. At the same time, what we do all have to remember is that the U.S., while our biggest customer, has now also become our biggest competitor. What we need to do in Alberta is focus on getting our product to tidewater. That's a fundamentally important thing, and that's why our government continues to work so hard on achieving that outcome.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: We know that the NDP's current support for Keystone XL is half hearted at best. In fact, when in opposition, the Premier herself directly stated in regard to Keystone XL, and I quote: we're

against it. Perhaps the NDP have warmed to Keystone XL slightly since their friend Justin Trudeau has sunk two other major pipeline projects. Thankfully, Keystone XL received NEB approval in 2010 under the leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, well before Justin Trudeau had a chance to meddle in the process. Can the Premier tell us what, if anything, the NDP government is doing to ensure the success of Keystone XL?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, our government is absolutely focused on diversifying the markets for our important product and, particularly, getting our product to tidewater, which is why we continue to work very hard on ensuring that the pipeline, which has been approved as a result of our advocacy, actually gets built. So we will be travelling across the country to talk about that. We will be advocating at every possible level in terms of the adjudicative procedure, where we actually have standing, unlike in the States, where we don't actually have standing. We will continue to work very hard because we know that, at the end of the day, getting that pipeline built is . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: We're against it: that's a direct quote from the NDP Premier of Alberta. On this side of the House we are in favour of pipelines in every possible direction.

Given that the same forces that successfully managed to kill Northern Gateway and Energy East now have Trans Mountain in their crosshairs and given that we have a Prime Minister that seemingly won't lift a finger to actually advocate for Trans Mountain, Premier, are you leaving this issue of critical importance to our province in the hands of Justin Trudeau, who has publicly mused about phasing out Alberta's oil sands? Do you actually trust Justin Trudeau with this process? I can tell you that Albertans don't.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, not only has our minister of environment and our minister of economic development and myself been down to the States to talk about the importance of enhancing energy trade and the pipelines associated with that over the course of the last several months, but in the areas over which we have control and agency, which is in Canada, we continue to work very hard and to represent all Albertans' interests and ultimately all Canadians' interests on the need to get the Trans Mountain pipeline built, and we'll be successful.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Federal Tax and Energy Policies

Mr. Nixon: We've been pushing this government for some time to actually stand up to the Trudeau Liberal attacks on Alberta, and on Friday I was happy to see that the government kind of, sort of took our advice. The Finance minister criticized Ottawa's revenue-sharing plan on the upcoming cannabis tax, and we agree. The provinces, which bear the majority of the costs, do deserve more than 50 per cent of the revenue, but why is it that the NDP are only willing to criticize Ottawa when it involves the state's bank account, not when it hits the pocketbooks of Albertans? When will the NDP stand up to their friend Justin Trudeau's attack on small businesses and his 67 per cent increase on the carbon tax?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what our government will do is work with the federal government, which has made a decision to take climate

change seriously on behalf of today's generations and generations and generations to come. We will work with them on matters of increasing renewable energy, on investing in green infrastructure, and on moving forward on things that will reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions because that is the way of the future. Pretending that the problem doesn't exist is a strategy of the past, and it is one that Albertans have abandoned.

Mr. Nixon: For months we urged the government to vocally object to the Trudeau Liberals' attack on small businesses. The NDP's response: they told Albertans to go weigh in on Liberal sham consultations. This NDP government stayed in hiding while people like Premier Brad Wall, Jason Kenney, the Official Opposition of Alberta, and others have been speaking out about this important issue. Now that the NDP, like the Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz*, has found some courage to stand up to Ottawa, will they vocally denounce the Trudeau Liberals' attacks on small business?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Rather than relitigating Mr. Kenney's loss to the Trudeau Liberals, what our government will do is stand up for Alberta small business. That is why we cut the small-business tax by a third. That is why we introduced two new tax credits. That's why we're restoring training programs for entrepreneurs. That's why we're working to expand small businesses into new markets. That's why we are the fastest growing economy in the country, and we will continue to be.

Mr. Nixon: The Trudeau Liberals meddle in the pipeline approval process and kill a pipeline critical to Alberta. They invade Alberta's constitutionally guaranteed right to control our resources, and the NDP barely make a noise, not even a peep. But on cannabis taxes the Finance minister is sent out to hold an emergency press conference. When will the NDP respond to the Trudeau Liberals' attacks on everyday Albertans with the same enthusiasm they use to defend their own bank accounts? If the NDP is now in the business of standing up to Ottawa, will they now vocally denounce the NEB changes, including the constitutional intrusion on upstream emissions?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite ought to know, in fact, our government has made our position with respect to the changes on the NEB very clear on behalf of the energy industry here in Alberta. But, you know, all that the members opposite want to do is fight with Ottawa. It's as if they see this Legislature as the personal plaything of their new leader... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Ms Notley: ... who's trying to work out his issues from the last federal election. You know what? Our job is actually to govern and to work for and with Albertans to make Albertans' lives better, and that's what we will... [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. Four more days, and then we can all have a break.

The third main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Provincial Response to Opioid Trafficking and Use

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all have been working so hard to find ways to stem the tide of fentanyl deaths. My pill press law, more addictions counselling, money to help police uncover drug labs: the list of recommendations goes on. But this past weekend

the associate minister responsible for the fentanyl file opened the door to – wait for it – decriminalizing all illicit drugs. This is a grossly irresponsible message. Will the associate minister, fully and without excuses or equivocation, withdraw her comments?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are no plans to decriminalize possession of any drugs at this time. The designation of drugs as... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Ms Payne: ... legal or illegal is a federal responsibility. Our focus is on addressing the opioid crisis, protecting public safety, and ensuring adequate treatment spaces are available to Albertans.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, this is outrageous. At a time when Albertans are dying at the hands of illicit narcotics, the government is sending a message that perhaps those very narcotics shouldn't be illegal. What message does that send to the drug dealers pushing this poison? Will the Premier clearly denounce her own minister's irresponsible and dangerous musings?

Ms Payne: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, our focus is on addressing the opioid crisis. In this House we've spoken repeatedly about how this is a public health emergency unlike any that we've ever seen before, and it requires a response that's different than the ones we've seen before. That is why our government is focusing on addressing the harms of opioid use and providing treatment spaces. Substance use is a medical condition that requires a health care response, unlike the war on drugs, that has failed, that this side keeps pushing.

Mr. Ellis: Heroin, crystal meth, fentanyl, crack cocaine: I could go on and on. As a police officer I've seen first-hand the human devastation that these hard drugs cause. Now is not the time to speculate about making these poisons legal. I ask again. Will the NDP firmly and without hesitation denounce speculation about decriminalizing hard narcotics?

Ms Payne: Mr. Speaker, I will say it again. There are no plans to decriminalize possession of other drugs at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow. [interjections] Order.

2:00 Auditor General Report on Health Care

Mr. Clark: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring the Auditor General released a comprehensive look into Alberta's health care system. Instead of making new recommendations, he simply took the 41 recommendations he'd already made and summarized them. His conclusion: Alberta's \$21 billion health care system is an orchestra without a conductor, which led to poor co-ordination, ineffective information sharing, and fragmented hospital-focused care. To the Premier: what specific actions have you taken to break down barriers in our health care system and build a preventative, integrated model of care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm incredibly proud of the work that we've done with health care professionals. There certainly have been musings about transformation in the past, but they were done in a way that was doing something to the

profession rather than with the profession. What we've been able to do very effectively is bring about a new government framework with primary care networks. That is something I'm incredibly proud of. Physicians stepped up to the table with us as well as other members of the primary care network team, and we're being able to move forward in a way that's collaborative, working to make sure that the patient health home is the model we all have moving forward.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General found that much of the care Albertans currently receive is one-off and focused on acute care either in a doctor's office or in a hospital, but there is a big gap when it comes to managing chronic conditions, including mental health, over the long term. Instead of measuring quality, the system focuses on funding parameters, on union negotiations, and it puts bureaucratic rules ahead of patient needs. Equally troubling is his comment that politics continue to play a big role in our system. Again to the Premier: what specific, measurable actions are you taking to address these problems once and for all?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad to have an opportunity to respond. I took the time to sit down with the Auditor General as well and talk through his report and his recommendations, and he did have a lot to say about inflammatory opposition questions that certainly cause great disruption to the system. I hope they also took time to sit down and talk to him about that same evolution of the health care system. I'm incredibly proud of the fact that for the first time in probably since AHS was created, we are moving forward in a collaborative way with the health care providers, with primary care networks, with the government to ensure that we have the right care in the right place. A big part of that is the evolution of the PCN model and working with Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Clark: Well, that's interesting, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General called this government's actions piecemeal at best. You'd think that after two and a half years they would at least have started on a plan. And speaking of plans, the AG said that the government should urgently address the overlapping roles of AHS and Alberta Health. Simply put, Alberta Health should hand over a lot of responsibility, but I suspect this ties into his comment about politics. Again to the Premier: when will we finally see a plan to implement the Auditor General's recommendations? And when we do, will it include clear, measurable goals so Albertans can track your progress?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very happy to meet with the Auditor General. Again, this specific report doesn't actually have recommendations in it. It has a number of different findings, and we're happy to move forward in collaboration with the Auditor General to do that while making public health care publicly accessible to all Albertans.

We know that the opposition wants to privatize health care. We believe health care should be based on medical need, not based on the size of your wallet. We know that Jason Kenney and the opposition plan to give his wealthy donors priority access to health care, Mr. Speaker. That's been made clear. We are building new hospitals, protecting Albertans throughout this province. I know who I trust with public health care, and it sure isn't the guys opposite.

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

Consumer Protection

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have some of the highest consumer spending of any province in Canada. Consumer spending across the province rose by 8 per cent over the last year, and Albertans are now spending more than they did before the drop in oil prices. I was personally involved in the public consultation process to provide better protections to consumers. To the Minister of Service Alberta: how is the government working to make sure that Albertans are treated fairly, whether they spend their hard-earned dollars at the car dealership, the grocery store, or a local small business?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We're working to make life better by protecting families from scams, misleading information, unfair tactics, aggressive sales pitches, and price gouging. We're taking action to help businesses compete on a level playing field. This summer we heard from Albertans through an online survey and open houses on ways that we can create a level playing field for both buyers and sellers. That creates consumer confidence, and it's good for business.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the government hearing from its consultations with the public and stakeholders regarding consumer protection?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We consulted with over 3,000 people this summer about consumer protection. So far the survey is very clear on two aspects. Albertans want strong consumer protections, as the paradise papers, for example, showed, and many fans, for example, feel that buying a concert ticket is a rigged game. Albertans want confidence that their consumer rights are protected. The details about the actual changes will come after we analyze all of the feedback received through the survey, open houses as well as the meetings that we had with business and community groups. The priority that we have will be ensuring that Albertans realize the changes that reflect their desire for strong protections and confidence that their consumer rights are respected.

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, to the same minister: what is the government doing to consult with businesses on the issue of consumer protection?

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjections]
Order.

An Hon. Member: Incoming. Incoming.

An Hon. Member: Tough one.

The Speaker: Order.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is about finding good solutions to getting bad actors out of the way that harm good businesses. Strong consumer laws are good for businesses. We know the majority of businesses are honest and that with strong rules that protect buyers, shoppers will be more confident doing business with them. We want a marketplace that's good for buyers and sellers, and that's why we've been consulting with a variety of

stakeholders from the business community to ensure that their perspective is reflected. This includes over 30 stakeholder meetings that we've had, including two round-tables held directly with members of the Edmonton and Calgary chambers of commerce.

Resources for LGBTQ2S Students and Their Parents

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the introduction of Bill 24 is an important step in affirming the privacy rights of children in GSAs. We know that GSAs promote the mental health and well-being of our LGBTQ2S students. One thing is being missed, and that is the involvement of supportive parents, that also contribute to the health and well-being of our LGBTQ2S students. Parents are the most important partners in discussing and promoting safe-sex practices, building respectful relationships with a partner, and setting reasonable boundaries for underage children. To the Premier: in situations where the student consents and where it won't compromise the privacy of other students, what's being done to bring supportive parents into the conversation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. As a former public school board trustee, I definitely spent a great deal of time engaging with students, and this was one topic that they frequently brought up. One of the things they talked about is that when you have time with your peers to talk about your coming-out experience, it can empower other kids on how to have those conversations with their parents. There certainly is a great deal of conversation to empower youth themselves to be able to be strong advocates and welcome their parents to a loving conversation which includes how they can live their lives as they are in a safe way.

Mr. Fraser: Given that in many cases LGBTQ students don't want their parents notified, not because there's any danger or lack of acceptance but simply that it can be a daunting conversation to have with their family, and given that many LGBTQ students may be negatively affected by wanting to tell their parents but don't know how and given that these students may come to their GSAs for advice on this issue, to the Premier: what resources are being made available to GSAs to support students that want to tell their family about their sexuality but aren't sure how?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member, again, for the important question. There are definitely support groups out there for GSAs and GSA facilitators. I know that when I was with Edmonton public, there was one staff identified at the school as a safe contact. They received professional development training. The ATA has extensive supports for teachers on how to run these organizations as well or support the youth in running these organizations, rather. Definitely, empowering youth to be confident in speaking and in engaging in these important conversations with the people who love them is a big part of what GSAs provide support on.

Mr. Fraser: Given that to a parent the health, safety, and well-being of their child is the most important thing in the world and given that in cases where their child is in immediate danger of harming themselves or others, the parent needs to be informed and given that one concern that I've heard from parents is that the increased privacy protection in Bill 24 will interfere with the school's ability to communicate with them in crisis situations, to

the same minister: can you assure this House that nothing in this legislation will interfere with the ability of schools to notify parents when their child is in immediate danger or crisis?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again to the member. Let me be definitively clear. If a child is at risk of self-harm or harm from another, there is a legal responsibility for individuals to be informed, that includes the parents if it's a self-harm concern. Teachers are well aware of their teaching quality standard requirements in that regard, and they will continue to provide their diligence in terms of acting in the role of a parent and providing information to the parent if their child is ever at risk.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

Access to Information

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, this is a government that is constantly under investigation for its rule breaking and secretive ways. Whether it's offering gift cards to delete e-mails or escalating delays for FOIP requests, this secretive government has a crisis of its own making. What's needed is political leadership to clean up this mess. Will the Premier agree that political staff interfering with access to information requests is not only unethical but is illegal?

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

Ms McLean: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government very much values the values of transparency, honesty, and protection of the public. We are confident that our actions are very much in line with the law. The results that the member across the way talks about – it's important that we put this in context. The e-mails he's referring to amount to less than .1 per cent of all GOA e-mails. It's important that we delete transitory documents so that they don't clog up the system and so that we have good, accurate accounting of documentation.

Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that today the UCP Official Opposition unearthed a FOIP document showing that this government is breaking the law and given that we released e-mails that show that one day before a freedom of information request was due to be released to the opposition, the Premier's former chief of staff put a full stop to the release and directly interfered and given that this was against all of the advice of the experts in the department, why, Premier, are your staff politically interfering with access to information requests? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. minister.

An Hon. Member: It's still illegal.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm not sure exactly who said that it was illegal. That's not the kind of word we want to hear in this House. Allegations such as that are very, very serious.

Hon. minister, please proceed.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, my comments were going to be along the same line. I would encourage the member opposite that if he feels a particular way, he ought to bring up his issues with the correct channels.

But at this time I will reiterate, certainly, that we are confident our actions are in line with the law, Mr. Speaker. Again, we take access to information very seriously. Certainly, there is more work to do, but we have improved turnaround times for FOIP requests by hiring more staff. We're also proactively sharing more information than the government of Alberta ever has.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier's former chief of staff directly interfered with an access to information request from the Official Opposition, will the Premier denounce this sort of behaviour, or is this the type of unethical law-breaking behaviour we can expect from this government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm taking it that the member opposite would like to apply for the position of the OIPC, given that he feels fit to determine matters of interest. They would know best what constitutes ethical and unethical disclosure, given that the leader of their party certainly does not see fit to disclose his campaign contributions or be particularly open with the public after having promised to do exactly that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I was wrong. We only have three days left, not four.

Coal Community Transition Funding

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, this government has finally gotten around to releasing long overdue plans to help Albertans currently working in thermal coal mines and coal-fired power plants after a summer where mayors of the affected towns referred to the government's communications with them as being pathetic and long on words, short on action. But two years late and a million short is better than never, I guess. To the minister of economic development. Royalty collection from coal last year alone was \$21 million. Do you think that your \$40 million Band-Aid is adequate compensation for the economic devastation your climate leadership plan has wrought on the affected towns?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, you know, coal workers have had a proud history in helping to power our prosperous and industrious province. We want to tell all coal workers: we're there for you. We're supporting workers by establishing a \$40 million coal workforce transition fund to provide income support for impacted workers. We're supporting them with tuition vouchers, third-party retraining, and a variety of professional certification courses, and we're supporting their communities. We have those communities' backs. We stand up for them and their workers.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that today almost 2,000 people work in coal-generated power and associated mining operations across Alberta and given that towns such as Wabamun, Hanna, and Forestburg rely on the economic activity generated by these high-paying jobs and will struggle to survive without this industry and its workers and given serious concerns that there will be no local jobs to replace good, mortgage-paying jobs in the coal industry, again to the minister: what specific industries with similar pay and benefits do you expect these workers in these affected towns to transition into, or do they all go on to . . .

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have the backs of these coal workers and these coal communities, who will get help from retraining and income supports. I must say that the Harper-Kenney governments did absolutely nothing for coal workers when Stephen Harper decided to phase out coal. We are supporting the communities through the transition with the coal community transition fund. Intake for that fund is open now and will run until November 30, 2017. We encourage all communities impacted to apply, and we will have people on the ground, talking to these workers directly, helping them.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gotfried: I think that's on their backs, Mr. Speaker.

Given that over the next 13 years more than half the people employed in thermal coal will lose their jobs and, again, given that the Finance Minister is constantly saying that the government will not balance the budget by putting more people out of work unless they work in coal, I guess, and given that your government has spent over \$9 million advertising your climate leadership plan, again to the minister. Almost \$10 million to advertise and only \$40 million to help: how many more Albertans could have been helped in their stressful transition away from thermal coal if you hadn't wasted all that money advertising your unpopular, unmeasurable plan?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are helping workers with tuition vouchers, with professional certification, with retraining. A lot of people have said positive things about this new plan. The mayor of Hanna, Chris Warwick, has said that these supports will go a long way for workers in the community. The Coal Association of Canada has said, "The release of the panel's recommendations and the announcement of the Coal Workforce Transition Fund is a step in the right direction." We have their backs, and we will be there.

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

Methane Emission Reduction

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our federal and provincial governments are committed to reducing methane emissions. Tim McMillan, president of CAPP, is quoted as saying, "We have a solution that positions Alberta as a global leader on methane emissions reductions, while maintaining a strong economy at home." This solution would help us remain competitive and retain jobs. To the Minister of Energy: have you listened to the concerns of industry, or are you taking into account the fact that Alberta already has world-class regulations on methane reduction?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're proud that we have been working alongside industry on a made-in-Alberta plan to reduce methane emissions by 45 per cent. We'll soon be announcing the next steps in a balanced plan that's going to protect jobs while also reducing pollution. We know what's at stake, Mr. Speaker, including jobs and the health of our province, and we want to leave behind a province that's better for our children and our grandchildren.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans have seen that this government's idea of consultation is to act first and tell

later and given that municipalities in northeastern Alberta such as in my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake have already expressed disappointment that they were not consulted by the federal government prior to the regulation changes, to the Minister: will you promise here today to protect 7,000 good-paying Alberta-wide jobs by not forcing the methane reduction plan on our oil sands without proper consultation?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the 45 per cent reduction target off 2013 levels came about as a result of consultation, in particular with industry who came to us with a plan saying that we can do better in Alberta, that we've got the know-how, we've got the workforce, we've got the clean tech capability just waiting on the sidelines. One of the things we did was fund \$40 million worth of the Emissions Reduction Alberta clean tech call. We developed an offset protocol to incent that early action. We are committed to solving the problems of the future and putting Albertans to work.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you've just stated you're not going to protect 7,000 jobs and given that new regulations may be detrimental to the economic growth of the Bonnyville-Lloydminster region and given that this area of the province cannot afford another round of mass layoffs that are anticipated to affect at least a thousand local workers in my constituency due to this methane reduction plan, to the minister: what assurances can you give the worried oil and gas workers in my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake that this government will work with industry to save local jobs in my constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we're working with industry for a made-in-Alberta plan. We do not want a plan forced on us by Ottawa, so we're working very hard with industry for this. We're taking steps to reduce pollution and tackle climate change and preserve jobs. We are very proud of the collaboration we've had. When these regulations are introduced, there will be a period of time for anybody in Alberta to reflect back on it and give us the feedback. This is about Alberta jobs, this is about our energy industry, and it's about standing up for Alberta.

Postsecondary Institution Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, there's an infrastructure deficit on Alberta's college, university, and technical school campuses. As a student I know the value of having a quality space for all aspects of my education. Students simply learn better when they have a great lecture hall, a world-class library, and even somewhere to socialize with their peers. To the Minister of Advanced Education: given that there are over 264,000 full-time and part-time students in Alberta, how is this government working to reduce the infrastructure deficit on campuses to give students the world-class facilities that they need?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We know that students learn best in modern learning environments. That's why our government has invested more than a billion dollars over four years in improving

infrastructure on campuses all across the province, including projects like the Northern Lakes campus expansion in High Prairie and the University of Calgary's MacKimmie complex redevelopment. Our government is supporting the important campus infrastructure projects that were left by the wayside under the previous government. Alberta students deserve better than the huge infrastructure deficit that was left by the Conservatives, and I'm happy to say that they are getting better from our government.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Building a multilevel library or lecture hall is surely no easy feat. It involves architects, engineers, skilled trades workers, and many others to build something like MacEwan University's recently opened Allard Hall. To the same minister: how many good-paying jobs is this government supporting by investing in campus infrastructure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government knows that Alberta is home to the most talented workforce in the country, and we're proud to support good-paying jobs all across the province. Recent infrastructure projects on campuses have created thousands of good-paying construction jobs and will provide additional hundreds of ongoing jobs at campuses. Our government is going to continue to make needed investments in campus infrastructure because it's the right thing to do for our students, it's the right thing to do for our higher education system, and it's the right thing to do for the province of Alberta. Our government's plan is working, and it's creating good jobs. Jason Kenney's plan . . .

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that a 20 per cent cut to Alberta's postsecondary institutions would be nothing short of devastating. Given the number of projects and significant investment in campus infrastructure by this government can the minister offer examples of projects that might not be built if his ministry had to cut its budget by 20 per cent?

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to. I've been hearing concerns from students all across the province about Jason Kenney's proposed reckless and extreme cuts on campuses. Students remember the last round of Conservative cuts that hit higher education, and they don't want to see that again. A 20 per cent cut not only would see all of the infrastructure projects grind to a halt but would see campuses with leaking roofs and crumbling buildings stay that way. It would mean Northern Lakes College doesn't get its new campus and that the U of A's Dentistry/Pharmacy building would stay in disrepair. Our government is not going to let that happen. We're going to keep making life better.

Supportive Living Facility Food Preparation

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, just like back in 2012 here we are five years later, and AHS is back to its old tricks again, where it is reported that in a supportive living facility in Claresholm residents receive little to no fresh food. Instead, despite an order by the Health minister back in 2012 the administration there has returned to substituting low-quality frozen then reheated preprocessed substandard food products. To the Health minister: why has AHS returned to this appalling practice of not supplying and preparing fresh food to the residents of this supportive living facility?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I'd be happy to follow up with regard to this very specific facility. But I'll tell you that's why I was so proud to bring forward legislation earlier this month that would make sure that we have resident family councils, and that would apply to all of these facilities. I really wish that members opposite would take time to reflect on what's being said around the importance of honouring our seniors and others who are living in care facilities instead of arguing with me while I'm answering their question and advocating for 20 per cent cuts. You want to think about what that would do to the people living in these facilities.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that in 2012 the CBC and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees did a video documentary on this terrible situation, titled *Tough to Swallow*, that provided clear evidence of this disgusting practice and given that the minister responded and gave an order to discontinue the practice of preparing meals off site and reheating and to bring back on-site food preparation, to the Health minister: what order was given by your office that reversed that decision of 2012 and caused the return of this appalling practice of not serving fresh food?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. No such order was issued by my office under my time in office. I can't say what happened when their dance partners were also in government between 2012 and May 2015, but under our government we're working to protect and strengthen long-term care and other types of supportive living. That's why we brought forward legislation that will ensure that we have resident and family councils. That's why we've protected their funding instead of advocating for deep, brutal cuts like the members opposite. We're working with and for the people who are in these care facilities.

Mr. Stier: Given that these facilities are home to the people who live there and that they deserve to enjoy fresh, nutritious food that looks and tastes home cooked and that satisfies cultural differences and given that the requirement to serve fresh food is reportedly not being followed by the administration in Claresholm and possibly in other similar facilities, will the minister order today to immediately require that these types of facilities discontinue the practice of preparing meals elsewhere and reheating them and instead serve fresh, nutritious food prepared on-site?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Let me create an opportunity here to invite the member to meet with me and discuss this matter in more detail. I certainly welcome any information he has. But I've learned not to take these kinds of accusations at face value in the House because regularly when members opposite say these kinds of things, they're proven to not be founded. So I welcome the member to sit down with me, have a conversation, and we'll certainly look into it. But I have to say it's important that we honour the staff and the residents in these facilities, protect their funding, and stop Jason Kenney's abusive cuts, that would certainly make life far worse.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

2:30 Gravel Mining in Rocky View County

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard numerous concerns from my constituents regarding a growing number of concentrated gravel pits in the Rocky View county in the Bears paw area. Residents are struggling with constant noise, health concerns, and increasingly overloaded roads as gravel trucks add to the already congested highways, which is causing an increasing number of accidents. In speaking with constituents and my municipal officials, they say that their concerns have fallen on deaf ears when it comes to this government. Can the Minister of Infrastructure please provide clarity on why such a large number of gravel pits were built so close together and what this government's plans are to address this?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, the question probably should come to the Minister of Transportation. We've been in contact with the municipality. We're very aware of the situation. We know that gravel pits have an impact on surrounding neighbours and traffic and so on, and it's important that we take steps to mitigate this. We are working with the community in order to do just that.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Minister.

The STAR gravel pit, which is provincially owned, has and continues to operate 24 hours a day at noise levels of 85 decibels, which is well above the legal limit. Given that the southwest ring road gravel pit was required to put mitigation measures in place such as a 10- to 30-metre buffer between the neighbourhood and excavation and a prohibition on rock crushing beginning at 9 p.m. and all construction ending at 10 p.m., can the minister please explain to me why their provincially owned STAR gravel pit is operating differently?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm certainly prepared to undertake to provide those answers to the member. I'm happy to meet with her to discuss this. It's a little bit complicated. There's been some correspondence back and forth, and the department is engaged with the municipality with respect to these issues.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. The municipal officials and constituents in my constituency haven't heard back from this government, so I'm hoping we can open up doors of communication. I will just ask: Minister, will you commit to engaging with the residents in the community and the municipal officials in fixing this problem?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, as always, we're very open to having conversations with municipal officials and MLAs representing the constituents. We know that gravel pits do have an impact, but I can assure the hon. member that we're working to make sure that whatever impacts there are as a result of the necessary work of these gravel pits are mitigated.

Agricultural Operation Practice Review Committee

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago in this House my hon. colleague from Drumheller-Stettler tried to pass a common-sense amendment to Bill 21, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions

Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. We now have producer groups such as the Alberta Federation of Agriculture expressing similar concerns over the dissolution of the agriculture operation practice committee. Minister, did your ministry take time to consult Alberta farmers and ranchers before you decided to use your majority to pass this piece of legislation, that ultimately could prove harmful to our ag producers?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The fact is that the review committee that the member is referring to hasn't had members on it since 2011. There have been reviews of agriculture practices, obviously, since then that have worked quite well and will continue to do so as we pick members of the review committee from the larger agriculture community itself.

Thank you.

Mr. Schneider: Given that a recent *Western Producer* article quoted the minister as stating that, quote, he will always use farmers and ranchers on this committee should the need arise to activate it again, unquote, and given that the minister also stated that he would try to use farmers and ranchers from the same general area to serve on this committee should it be necessary, Minister, what about the next minister who serves in your capacity? What assurances do Albertans have that they, too, will abide by your decision and not use government staff to fill this committee?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The truth is that this very small amendment will have no effect on the work that the department already does, the ministry already does in making sure that farmers' voices are heard, in making sure that any issues that might arise from what might be an intensive livestock operation, those concerns, will still be reviewed as they always have been and always will be.

Mr. Schneider: Given that in this same article it confirms that there are two cases currently in front of the AOPA committee and given that we warned this government that this was the case and given that the minister repeatedly stated that the AOPA committee isn't necessary, that "facts are facts" and "the effectiveness of this committee doesn't exist because for the past six years there was nobody sitting on it," Minister, considering all of these facts, could your lack of awareness have unintended consequences for these matters currently being heard by the AOPA?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The practice review committees: there are actually two cases in process right now. They're going through the process. The rights of Albertans continue to be known. You know, we felt that on these review committees – the committees are made up of people from the larger agriculture community, will continue to be so. I'll restate yet again that there have been no members on this disbanded committee, there haven't been since 2011, and everything in the review process is still going forward.

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

Farm and Ranch Worker Regulation Consultation

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have grave concerns regarding the recommendations that have recently been issued by

the technical working groups with respect to the occupational health and safety regulations for farms and farm workers. I've been receiving feedback from stakeholders and agricultural service boards with respect to the OHS recommendations as well as the timeline for comments. Seeing as how this Minister of Labour has a poor track record on actually consulting with Albertans on her policies, can the minister explain why she has once again introduced an inadequate consultation period prior to important changes in legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the work that our government has done to make sure that farm and ranch workers and owners and operators have been involved in the technical working groups, and I thank the technical working groups and their chairs for the important work that they have done. We have posted their recommendations, along with plain-language summaries to make those recommendations accessible to all Albertans, on our website for a review period that will cross into January. We wanted to give farm and ranch workers, operators, and owners significant time to be able to review these recommendations when they aren't during a busy season. I look forward to their feedback.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, given that producers across the province are completing harvest, bringing feed in, moving cattle, weaning and marketing cows and given that the timelines placed on the comment period do not allow for ample enough time for farmers and ranchers and farm workers to review the recommendations and to clearly understand their impacts and to comment on them and given that this minister has received correspondence asking to extend the comment cut-off date to April 2018, is this minister prepared to extend the cut-off date and ensure that farmers have the input they need to ensure that these recommendations truly reflect what is in their best interests?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've spoken clearly to Albertans about making sure that they are fully engaged in the reviews that we are doing, and the work of the technical working groups was a very important step in that process. We've given 11 weeks for comment on these recommendations as well as plain-language summaries of the recommendations so that Albertans can take the time to review what is happening and provide their feedback to our government. I look forward to receiving any correspondence that the member opposite is referring to. We want to make sure that farmers and ranchers are engaged and that workers are safe.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Bill 6 was passed by this Legislature despite the concerns of Alberta farmers and given that this government promised that it would fix the problems through regulations that would respect the concerns of Alberta farmers and given that you've been asked to hold at least two town hall meetings in each region regarding the impacts of the OH and S recommendations, is this minister prepared to hold these town hall meetings to ensure that the impacts of the OH and S recommendations will actually benefit Alberta farmers, or is introducing some NDP, ideologically driven agenda more important?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Working with the farm and ranch community, working with stakeholder groups like the AgCoalition: these are important to me. We have given 11 weeks for Albertans to be able to review a plain-language summary or the detailed technical recommendations of the technical working group. I look forward to hearing feedback from Albertans over the next several months about the work that the technical working group has done. It is a priority for our government to make sure that workers are safe and that the farm and ranch way of life is protected. We are working to do both of those things in collaboration with the community.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:40

Members' Statements

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

Métis Week

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Métis Nation of Alberta has declared this week Métis Week, a time to celebrate the history, culture, traditions, and contributions that Métis people make to Alberta. As a Métis person I am exceptionally proud to stand in our Legislature and to speak to the contributions of Métis people in Alberta and across the country.

Alberta is home to the largest Métis population in Canada, with over 114,000 Métis people living here. We are proud to be the only province with a recognized Métis land base in the forms of eight Métis settlements. We are appreciative of the important role Métis people have played in Alberta's history, society, and economy.

November 16 is Louis Riel Day, which honours the legacy of Louis Riel and commemorates the anniversary of his death. Louis Riel devoted and sacrificed his life defending the rights of Métis people. His legacy continues to resonate across Alberta and the country.

Many Louis Riel Day and Métis Week events are happening in our province this week. Tomorrow the Métis Nation of Alberta and the city of Edmonton will host a Métis Week proclamation and Métis flag-raising ceremony. A ceremony commemorating the hon. Louis Riel will occur here at the Legislature on Thursday morning. The Métis Nation of Alberta region 5 is hosting a number of events on Thursday in Slave Lake, including an open house and community dance. The Métis Nation of Alberta region 3 is hosting several events in Calgary this week, including dinners and family fun days. These are just some of the many events going on this week.

I encourage everyone to take this opportunity to learn more about the dynamic culture and traditions of Métis people and the significant role Métis people have played and continue to play in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government Policies

Mr. Loewen: This government is selling so much bull that you'd think they were auctioneers, but Albertans aren't buying.

Let's start with Bill 6, that was sold as farm safety. The facts: we know it had little to do with safety and much more to do with organized labour.

How about the revenue-neutral carbon tax they never campaigned on? The facts: it didn't take long for the truth to be revealed, and then they called it revenue recycled.

Next was the claim that the climate leadership plan would buy social licence. The facts: two cancelled pipelines, zero pipelines built, and the protesters protesting pipelines are still protesting pipelines. Go figure. Billions of dollars for nothing.

The environment minister was warned repeatedly about the impending disaster regarding lake aeration but insisted that everything was under control. The facts: dead fish.

Every time the NDP have announced a budget and foolish spending, we warned of credit downgrades. They laughed. The facts: since 2015 five credit downgrades.

When the government passed legislation to cap the debt-to-GDP ratio at 15 per cent, we warned the government that unless they tackled spending, it would be meaningless. They shouted that we were wrong. The facts: they repealed their own bill just three months later.

When this government decided to mess with the electrical system, this side of the House warned the NDP over and over again to at least read the contracts. We were told that they knew better. The facts: the government has been scrambling to pass bills to counteract consequences, even suing power companies for legal provisions clearly articulated.

Now, this is one of my favourites. When I stood in this House and called out the Health minister for not being forthright with the people of Grande Prairie on their hospital completion date and other pertinent information, she suggested that I didn't remember what was discussed at a meeting. The facts: I do remember; I was there. There are documents proving that the information was available to the Health minister and the Minister of Infrastructure months before the meeting, but they did not share it. When responding to my question on the delays, the minister said: "I wasn't aware of any deadlines. That's absolutely fact." Sorry. Not fact.

So when we hear the government say that they are making life better for Albertans, the fact is that we know that it's absolutely not true.

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

World Diabetes Day

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to acknowledge World Diabetes Day. November 14 is recognized around the world as World Diabetes Day thanks to a UN resolution passed in 2006. Diabetes, although very common, is not a chronic illness that gets a lot of attention, and it is important to raise awareness of the hardships diabetes sufferers encounter every day.

I know how difficult dealing with diabetes can be because I myself suffer from the chronic illness. It also pains me to say that my husband's mother passed away as a result of complications from diabetes. Diabetes has affected my family, and chances are it has affected yours. More than 20 per cent of Canadians over the age of 20 deal with this disease.

This illness puts people in a position that necessitates serious lifestyle and dietary changes in order to avoid complications and live the best life they can. The Alberta government also recognizes the challenges of diabetes and is continuing to invest in supports such as providing coverage for supplies, medication, and insulin pumps. We recognize the challenge individuals living with diabetes face every day and the strength and courage needed to manage your illness.

Lastly, as a show of solidarity with those dealing with diabetes, the Alberta Legislature will be embracing the colour of national diabetes month by being lit up blue.

Thank you to Diabetes Canada for its efforts to support those with diabetes and to help others understand how to minimize their risks and to all of the charitable organizations who support research and those who are affected by diabetes. Together we can continue to educate about the risks of diabetes and work towards making life better for those that suffer from this condition.

Thank you.

Access to Information

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is running its operations with an unprecedented, CIA black ops level of secrecy. As we know, last spring the office of the Privacy Commissioner tabled two reports in this Legislature highlighting the systematic secrecy deployed by this government when it comes to the FOIP Act.

The Privacy Commissioner's report read more like a 1920s mob story, with lawyers speaking on behalf of FOIP witnesses, political interference at the highest levels, and findings that led the Privacy Commissioner to state:

What should have been a relatively straightforward investigation has concluded under a shadow that brings the very notion of independent oversight of the executive branch . . . into question and has the potential to erode public confidence in an open and accountable government.

This in conjunction with massive delays and backlogs in the FOIP system, direction for political staffers in government departments to delete over 800,000 e-mails, and the fact that the Premier's chief of staff had one e-mail in his sent box, 78 in his inbox, and an empty deleted mail folder for the entire time in his role in the Premier's office. It is very clear that the government has something to hide from Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, on top of all of the insurmountable evidence that the government has exhibited a pattern of secrecy and manipulation, the UCP has now released evidence that shows that the Premier's then chief of staff, Mr. Heaney, politically interfered with a FOIP request from the Official Opposition at the last minute, when it had already been cleared by the department's FOIP officials, which is a clear contravention of the FOIP Act and is against the law.

Mr. Speaker, political interference like this is unacceptable. The fact that this government feels it's above the law, independent oversight bodies, and Albertans' access to information speaks of a new level of arrogance. I call on the Premier to immediately make changes, take some accountability.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Workers' Compensation Review

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, our government believes that all workers have a right to a fair, safe, and healthy work environment, and if any of them happen to get hurt on the job, they should be supported.

Albertans are often interacting with the workers' compensation system at one of the most difficult times for themselves and their families. That's why it's absolutely crucial that Albertans feel confident that the WCB provides fair compensation and meaningful rehabilitation for their workers. At the same time, the employers that fund the system also need to be protected from potential lawsuits.

Today in the House I will be tabling a document produced by the Canadian Injured Workers Association of Alberta that contains the

names of hundreds of Albertans who want to see changes to the WCB.

Mr. Speaker, the last comprehensive review of the WCB was done more than 15 years ago. The Conservatives had years to act on this, but instead they chose to ignore this. I'm very proud that, unlike the Conservatives, our government has taken action and is working to make life better for all Albertans through the WCB review. I know that the Minister of Labour has received recommendations from the WCB Review Panel, and whatever changes result, I am incredibly proud that the review was an open and inclusive process.

2:50

But today I want to focus on the people who are personally affected by the WCB and its policies. No matter what changes are made to the system, it is not the system that feels the pain but the workers who suffer from physical disability, that cannot support their families because they can no longer work. These workers and their families deserve our compassion and our support.

I would like to recognize and thank the Canadian Injured Workers Association of Alberta for their tireless work in representing the interests of injured workers in this province. I know that both they and all Albertans look forward to hearing from the Minister of Labour and the WCB very soon about these important changes that will make life better for workers and families across the province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Red Tape

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, this morning compelling arguments were presented that there is a need for government to implement a red tape reduction strategy. The point of reducing red tape is to stimulate economic growth, which in turn leads to more jobs. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade has repeatedly claimed that his number one priority and the number one priority of this government is job creation. So it is baffling to stakeholders as to why the NDP members would speak against this common-sense bill this morning. Small and mid-sized businesses are the engine of economic growth in any economy, and they are disproportionately affected by red tape.

Governor Susana Martinez said, quote: The big corporations have a team of lawyers and accountants to help them. It's the small businesses, the ma-and-pa shops that get lost in the layers of red tape. End quote.

Germain Belzile states, quote: New regulations in Canada, including things like carbon pricing, coupled with the regulatory burden under President Trump in the United States have seen investments leaving Canada and flowing to the U.S. instead. Alberta in particular is experiencing a dizzying downturn. The regulatory burden seems to be particularly at fault since it is estimated that its cost will rise by between 12 per cent and 21 per cent in the near future and even more after 2023, when the carbon tax will be applied to the oil and gas sector. End quote. If there ever was a time when the Alberta government needed to help entrepreneurs succeed, the time is now, Mr. Speaker.

Brad Wenstrup states:

Politicians think that government can make better decisions than you and me. But we know better. We know it's smaller, less intrusive government that will lead to real economic prosperity. We know it's business-friendly policies, not more red tape, that will create real growth.

Small ma-and-pa business owners and not-for-profits are drowning in red tape, Mr. Speaker. They wear multiple hats, and that wears

them out. Wouldn't it be nice if the government recognized their contribution by recognizing their regulatory burden?

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Bill 29 An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving.

Mr. Speaker, impaired driving is the leading cause of criminal death and injury in Canada. If this bill passes, it will support our government's goal of zero impairment-related collisions and fatalities on Alberta roads.

I look forward to good discussion on the bill with my colleagues, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a first time]

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

Bill 209 Radon Awareness and Testing Act

Ms Luff: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce a bill, Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act.

Mr. Speaker, it's important that we protect the health of Albertans against the very real dangers of radon. Radon is a colourless, odourless, and tasteless gas which is responsible for an estimated 16 per cent of lung cancer deaths every year. In 2006 alone an estimated 1,900 lung cancer deaths in Canada were due to radon exposure. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking. Bill 209 will support greater education about radon and will ensure that child care spaces are tested for radon to help safeguard the well-being of our youngest and most vulnerable citizens.

I look forward to discussion and deliberation with my colleagues in the House.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This being Bullying Awareness Week, I rise to table five copies of a story from the *Edmonton Journal* about toxic workplace culture inside the city of Edmonton that is causing employees to quit.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and table the requisite five copies of a document produced by the Canadian Injured Workers Association of Alberta that contains the names of hundreds of Albertans who want to see changes to the Workers' Compensation Board. I would like to recognize the Canadian Injured Workers Association of Alberta for their work in representing the interests of injured workers all over Alberta.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first will provide context as to why the Member for Edmonton-Decore was wearing a University of Calgary Dinos jersey. The first one is entitled Dinos Stop Bears, Advance to 10th Straight Hardy Cup with a 39-22 victory.

The second one is DiFonte Good from 59 as Dinos Win Epic Hardy Cup Title. As you may be well aware, Niko DiFonte scored a 59-yard field goal to bring the University of Calgary Dinos to the Mitchell Bowl next weekend.

The third tabling, for context or for anyone who's interested, is the lineup for the Calgary edition of *Dancing with the Stars*, in which I'll be participating on Wednesday, November 29.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a press release done by CAPP, Methane Plan Can Cut Emissions by 45%, Protect 7,000 Jobs: CAPP. I will say that it is distressing to see that we're going down a road that could cost my constituency a thousand jobs.

I have four other letters here. One is from an individual, but most of these letters are just explaining to the Minister of Energy how, if not implemented correctly, the 45 per cent reduction in our emissions cap will actually cause immense amounts of grief within Alberta, and that's not just my constituency.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a copy of a report from the climate leadership plan on the Alberta climate change website, which indicates that there are six to 31 years of lost economic activity, royalties, and power production over and above those legislated by federal regulation. I have the five requisite copies here.

I also rise to table a media report from the Parkland county news, a news release saying Parkland County Responds to Advisory Panel on Coal Communities Recommendations in which Mayor Rod Shaigec says, "The power companies have been paid through the off-coal agreements, yet the government continues to forget about the communities that built this province."

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Finance I rise to table five copies of the November 2017 results-based budgeting report to Albertans.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Bilous, Minister of Economic Development and Trade, return to order of the Assembly MR 14, asked for by Mr. Cooper on May 1, 2017.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Ganley, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act the Alberta Law Foundation financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2017.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Hoffman, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, return to order of the Assembly MR 20, asked for by Mrs. Pitt on May 1, 2017.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe there was a point of order, but it was withdrawn.

3:00

Orders of the Day Government Motions

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Morning Sitting Cancellation

31. Mr. Carlier moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that, notwithstanding Standing Order 3(1) and Government Motion 30, which was passed on October 31, 2017, the morning sitting of the Assembly on Thursday, November 16, 2017, be cancelled.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This change is made to accommodate greater participation in AAMDC events that morning. As members are also aware, Louis Riel Day ceremonies are also scheduled to take place in the rotunda that day at 11 a.m.

The Speaker: Does anyone wish to speak to the matter?

[Government Motion 31 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 27

Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017

[Debate adjourned November 9: Mr. Piquette speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, please proceed.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise in the House this afternoon to continue discussion on what I think is a very good, very timely bill that is living up to our promise to Albertans to make life better.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I think, definitely, that this is a bill that, in particular, will make life better for board members and staff of the agencies, boards, and commissions who, as I mentioned previously, are in charge of almost half of our government's total budgetary spending. With that type of resource in play, obviously, the public has a very keen concern that the money and the decisions around the money that these agencies, boards, and commissions make are above reproach. I think that that's a very reasonable expectation for them to have. Unfortunately, in the present situation it is not always clear just what that means in practice. Of course, that's because these requirements are not consistent across agencies, boards, and commissions, leaving perhaps sometimes board members or staff with unclear guidelines on what constitutes a conflict of interest.

As we as elected officials know in our own public lives, it's not always clear-cut what would be considered to be a violation of conflict of interest. I can give you examples where members in the past have gotten into difficulties with accepting tickets to events or plane rides to particular locations, and the list goes on. I mean, these are things that are sometimes taken without really thinking through the consequences and thinking through the impact that they might have on the independence of mind when making decisions about those groups.

Why is this a concern? Well, it's simple human nature. It's human nature for people to return good for good, you know, to behave towards people that they consider friendly in a friendly fashion. Although that might work well in our personal lives, when you're making decisions based on the overall public good,

sometimes that can lead to decisions being made that otherwise would not have been made.

I think that, you know, this type of culture or perception of this culture indeed speaks to what happened just two years and a bit ago when first we had a new government put in place by the people of Alberta. I know that when I was out door-knocking during that election campaign, that was one of the concerns that was brought up, that the previous government had been in power for so long and had appointed basically all the members of the agencies, boards, and commissions, and there was a perception in some quarters that it had become kind of an old boys' network situation, where if you scratch my back, I'll scratch your back.

Now, fairly or unfairly, I think that that perception is something that we needed to address. Indeed, it was something that our Finance minister had promised to address, and I think that Bill 27 goes a long way toward doing just that by making sure that these conflict-of-interest requirements are consistent across agencies, boards, and commissions. I think that it would help restore confidence for Albertans that agency, board, and commission members and staff are indeed acting in the public interest.

That being said, I don't want to impugn, you know, members of agencies, boards, and commissions as it stands now. Sometimes it just takes a few bad apples. Sometimes it just takes the perception of a few bad apples to erode public goodwill and trust. So it's very, very critical that when our citizens go before these agencies and boards and commissions, there is an understanding that, yes, they are indeed not in anybody's pocket, that they are indeed really making impartial decisions which reflect the best possible decision for the public trust. Once again, I think that this is an excellent bill to bring that forward.

When I left off last Thursday, I was just going through, you know, some of the questions on the details of this conflict-of-interest legislation. Now, one question would be regarding timing. Once this bill is passed, when would the core statutory requirements take effect? This would happen immediately on proclamation of the amendments to the Conflicts of Interest Act; however, there will be a two-year transition period in some situations, simply because it's recognized that restrictions particularly on concurrent employment offices and appointments and these additional requirements may not be consistent with current employment contracts. To allow for a two-year transition period will help mitigate these types of issues and would be utilized prior to requirements taking effect or upon a new contract or a contract renewal for impacted staff or members, whichever comes first.

Now, I did draw the comparison between elected officials and the conflict-of-interest legislation that applies to us. Are there any differences in how this act would apply to public agencies as opposed to what we and our political staff, you know, currently have to follow? Well, in fact, it's going to have many of the same requirements for chairs, CEOs, and equivalents in public agencies as what we currently are working under. However, there are going to be some requirements for public agencies that are going to be a bit different, of course, because there are some requirements of the existing act that are specific to elected officials and their senior staff. So that's there.

3:10

Another question might be: what's been the public response so far to this legislation? Well, I mean, this hasn't been on the top of the news cycle; however, it has been attracting some interest. You know, from the constituents that I've had the opportunity to talk to about this, the response has been not just generally but completely positive. I think this is a bill that reflects the wishes and interests of the Alberta public and definitely, like I said, is upholding real

commitments that we made, and that's always appreciated. Albertans, I think, do appreciate to see a government that is sincerely working to make life better and sincerely working hard to make its commitments real.

It's for all of these reasons that I think this bill is an excellent one and one that I would strongly encourage all members of the House to support unanimously. With that, I think I can conclude my remarks.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 27, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017. Bill 27 proposes to create a consistent set of rules for the province's agencies, boards, and commissions that fall under the jurisdiction of the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. The agencies included in Bill 27 include Alberta Health Services, postsecondary institutions, the Alberta Securities Commission, and the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. In addition to the ones I've just listed and the other 136 agencies, boards, and commissions that fall under APAGA, Covenant Health and three Alberta Health Services subsidiaries – Calgary Laboratory Services, the CapitalCare group, and Carewest – are also being included under these new conflict-of-interest rules.

Something that I have discovered during my time as an elected official is that often the perception of a conflict is as concerning as the actual conflict of interest. Bill 27 addresses that issue by closing loopholes that appeared to allow executives and board members of Alberta's many agencies, boards, and commissions to conduct themselves in ways that simply didn't stand up to the public's demand for accountable and transparent governance. I believe that Bill 27 will improve the public's confidence in Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions, something that has sometimes lacked in the past.

A few highlights of the legislation, Madam Speaker, include a requirement that all agencies, boards, and commissions submit their codes of conduct to the Alberta Ethics Commissioner for review within four months of proclamation. I hope that most of these organizations would already have codes of conduct in place, but Bill 27 will bring greater clarity to Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions.

Another requirement in Bill 27 is for the Ethics Commissioner to review the codes of conduct by March 31 and report their findings a month later. In addition, Bill 27 will require board members and employees, first of all, to conduct themselves impartially; second, to disclose real and apparent conflicts of interest; then, to place restrictions or limitations on acting in self-interest or furthering private interests, the acceptance of gifts, and, finally, to holding concurrent employment or other offices.

Due to their executive position within the organization, CEOs and their equivalents would be subject to additional restrictions on other employment and business undertakings, appointments to other organizations that constitute a real or apparent conflict of interest, a requirement to disclose financial information to the Ethics Commissioner, restrictions on holding stocks and other securities, and additional restrictions for a 12-month cooling-off period following employment with a public agency to prevent CEOs from benefiting from any decisions they have made. This provision will take effect after a two-year notice period or immediately after a reappointment or a new appointment.

Now, some may claim that the provisions of Bill 27 are not needed and unfairly cast aspersions on many people who work, sometimes voluntarily, Madam Speaker, without pay, on Alberta's many agencies, boards, and commissions, and I agree. Most of the

people that this legislation will affect are good, morally upstanding, and good-hearted people. They conduct themselves with the utmost respect for the taxpayers, that ultimately fund all these organizations.

However, there have been a number of high-profile cases where individuals have failed to conduct themselves in a manner that befitted the office they held. One example was widely reported in 2014, when Alberta's Public Interest Commissioner investigated and ultimately confirmed that an AHS staff member had a conflict of interest when they awarded a \$75,000 contract to a consulting company in which they held shares. If this bill can eliminate that type of blatant disregard for basic good governance policies, I support Bill 27 at second reading.

But, Madam Speaker, while I am supportive of Bill 27, I have a number of questions that I look forward to getting answers to as the debate continues. One of my questions is: how will the employment restrictions affect those people that represent their industry? These are people that are appointed or elected to their position largely based on their work experience in their specific industry. An example would be a realtor serving on the Real Estate Council of Alberta. As debate moves to Committee of the Whole, I may have amendments to move that reflect some of the feedback I have received since this bill was tabled.

However, at second reading members are asked to consider the intent and context of the legislation being debated, and I believe fully that the intent of Bill 27 is one that I can support. Therefore, I will be supporting Bill 27 at second reading, and I urge all members to do likewise.

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 will now recognize the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The public trust. Who does the public trust? What does a mandate to govern give you other than the public trust? I think that's what we're fundamentally debating here today, and I'm pleased to rise today to express my support for Bill 27, an act to expand conflict-of-interest rules to agencies, boards, and commissions.

Madam Speaker, that public trust is something we all seek on both sides of this House, and we obtain, gain, and maintain the trust of the Alberta public every day that we operate in this House. It was determined in May of 2015 that when that public trust is lost, even in Alberta, politics 101 applies, and a government will change.

That's what we're talking about today, maintaining that public trust by strengthening rules around conflict of interest as they apply to agencies, boards, and commissions. [interjections] I'm not sure what members opposite are laughing about. I thought I was being pretty serious about some fundamental principles that we operate under in this House and that I take extremely seriously and seek to find agreement in this House about.

The fundamental foundation of what we really seek to do here is to maintain that public trust, which is a sacred trust between us and the people we serve. In order to do that, the transparency of our interests must be very, very open and clear. I think Bill 27 does that. It makes sure that we strengthen the Alberta Conflicts of Interest Act and expand it to apply to senior staff of our province's agencies, boards, and commissions. That's what our government is proposing to do with this legislation.

3:20

Alberta's public agencies play a pivotal role in regulating, managing, and delivering important programs and services to

Albertans on behalf of government as well as in providing oversight and advice on provincial issues. Public agencies are a significant part of Alberta's public sector, and together they account for about half of the government's total yearly budget. That's a significant amount of the public trust that is entrusted to agencies, boards, and commissions. Albertans have high expectations that publicly governed agencies are relevant, effective, transparent, well governed, and accountable to government and to Albertans. A consistent set of rules for conflicts of interest is critical in increasing the accountability of public agencies, protecting Alberta's tax dollars, and ensuring that public agencies are governed transparently.

The public trust is a sacred trust which must always be protected and never be taken lightly or with, I would say, a lack of seriousness at any point. Every day that we are in this House, we must always keep that public trust and the sacredness of it paramount in our minds when we deliberate and talk on any bill, no matter what the bill happens to be. So in second reading I'm pleased to express my support once again for Bill 27. The changes proposed in this bill make clear the roles and expectations that would be put in place to ensure that the public agencies' staff and board members are acting in the public interest.

Once again, if indeed the public determines that their interests are not being served, they will exercise their right to change governments. We are ever more cognizant of that on this side of the House than any government ever has been in this province, and we aim to keep the public trust uppermost in mind in every bill that we bring forward, including this one, Madam Speaker. Once again, our agencies provide valuable services that make life better for Albertans such as higher education, protecting vulnerable people, and delivering health services. It's vitally important that our public agencies are held to the same standards that we expect of our elected officials and senior public servants.

The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat across the way mentioned the real estate industry not too long ago in his comments, and one of the things that I wanted to talk about as well is the fact that no matter whether it's business or government, the public trust is something that must be fundamentally top of mind in how we operate with the members of the public. Business has the same responsibility. Most every industry, including the real estate industry, has conflict-of-interest guidelines and rules of ethics and codes of conduct. That public support, that public trust, on an individual basis, on an industry basis, and also on a government basis, has to be maintained and held as sacrosanct on an ongoing basis and never be forgotten because the public will remind us of it, whether we're in business or in government, of the responsibility to make sure that their interests are served in this democracy we so dearly love.

It's vitally important that our public agencies are held to the same high standards. As I mentioned, the bill proposes that public agencies that are already subject to APAGA, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, would also be subject to the Conflicts of Interest Act. As of November 1 there are 136 of these agencies. Also included in this list would be three Alberta Health Services subsidiaries and Covenant Health.

Bill 27 proposes a number of prescribed elements that would apply to employees and board members of all applicable public agencies. Changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act would require all public agencies to have codes of conduct that include these prescribed elements. They are a requirement to conduct themselves impartially; restrictions on acting in self-interest or furthering a private interest by virtue of one's position; disclosure of real and apparent conflicts of interest; restrictions on gifts, including monetary limits; limitations on concurrent employment or other offices, including processes for seeking approval.

Now, these principles really seem to be something that many industries follow. I know that in the real estate industry, where I worked for 30 years as a real estate agent, they are very reminiscent of the rules that we were expected to follow. Our industry guidelines reflected similar principles.

Whether in government or business, the public expectation is high that their interests will be served beyond the interests of those who are in place to serve the public. I think that Bill 27 just goes to continue that demand of government that the interest of the public is sacrosanct and continues to be considered as a paramount and fundamental necessity in maintaining the public interest and that trust that our democracy is built upon.

All APAGA agencies would be required to submit updated codes of conduct reflecting these prescribed elements to the Ethics Commissioner within four months of the act being proclaimed. The Ethics Commissioner will review all revised codes to ensure that they meet the requirements of the act and sign off by March 31, 2019. Agencies would then have to publish their new codes of conduct no later than April 30, 2019.

Now, the legislation also proposes a set of core statutory requirements for CEOs and board chairs. For all agency board members and employees the core requirements would be a baseline standard, enforced through codes of conduct that public agencies would be required to implement. Public agencies could have additional restrictions, but these are the ones that all agencies would be required to implement.

The legislation also proposes a set of core statutory requirements for CEOs and board chairs. These requirements include restrictions on private interest, restrictions on using influence, restrictions on using insider information, disclosure of real and apparent conflicts of interest, once again principles that, whether in business or government, those serving the public are expected to hold dear and adhere to without exception. They're fundamental to maintaining the public trust, which, as we know so well in this province, actually will be taken from a government that disregards it.

There's an additional core statutory requirement that would apply to CEOs and equivalents, restrictions on concurrent employment and holding other offices. This additional core statutory requirement would take effect immediately for new hires, upon reappointment, or following a two-year notice period.

CEOs and equivalents of significant agencies would also be subject to additional statutory requirements upon designation, including restrictions on holding stocks and other public securities; disclosure to the Ethics Commissioner, including financial disclosure; postemployment restrictions, specifically a 12-month cooling-off period following employment with a public agency. These additional statutory requirements would be set out in the act, but the positions that they would apply to would be designated in a separate order in council and come into effect on contract renewals and new appointments, once again measures that, no matter whether you're in business or in government, the public expects to be enforced to hold government and business to a high standard.

In this case Bill 27 looks at holding these executives, CEOs of the agencies, boards, and commissions to that high standard of public trust that the public in this province insists that they deserve and demands that they have. The consequences of May 2015 showed that in a most excellent way.

Where current contracts are longer term, a two-year transition period would apply so that within two years all CEOs and board chairs would be subject to these enhanced requirements. Through orders in council, cabinet would have the ability to add or exempt agencies and positions from any of the conflict-of-interest requirements.

We propose a statutory requirement for all public agencies to have codes of conduct with the required elements. Now, to enhance oversight and enforcement, we also propose to apply the restrictions on furthering private interest, using influence, and using insider information as statutory requirements within the Conflicts of Interest Act.

Madam Speaker, these elements of this legislation, this bill, really just simply make sense and are an extension of our respect for the fundamental principle of maintaining the public trust, that we think the public in Alberta deserves and governments right throughout this country and any democratic country should be applying and maintaining. These restrictions would be carried out through orders in council and would apply to board chairs and CEOs of public agencies on contract renewals and new appointments.

There would be also a two-year transition period to ensure that CEOs with longer term contracts would also come under the new requirements within the two-year time frame rather than on expiration of the contract.

In Bill 27 it is proposed that cabinet would have the ability to add or exempt agencies and positions from any of the conflict-of-interest requirements. The Ethics Commissioner would have the authority to receive and review disclosures from designated CEOs and their equivalents. It would reduce requirements for restrictions on public securities and restrictions on postemployment. Alleged breaches of the act by the board would be investigated, and other designated senior positions issue reports and make recommendations to the responsible minister and/or the board.

3:30

In closing, I'm really proud to say that our government has been doing great work to maximize the value of agencies, boards, and commissions. We see numerous important changes to increase transparency, fiscal accountability, and diversity and a significant progress government-wide in several different areas, including in fair and appropriate executive compensation, effective use of public dollars, transparency and accountability, including salary disclosure and revitalization of board appointment diversity, and a diligent appointment process.

Madam Speaker, I wish to encourage all members in the Legislature here to support this important piece of legislation. We all seek, as I said before, on both sides of this House, to obtain and maintain the trust of the Alberta public. That sacred trust is something that they will remove if indeed it is breached, and May 2015 proved that beyond a shadow of a doubt. Whether we're in business, whether we're in government, our practices and behaviours must be governed by and founded on the fundamental principle of the sacredness of the public trust. That public trust is something that we on this side of the House and, I believe, all members of this Legislature take seriously every day as we sit here to serve our constituents in the best way that is within our abilities. I believe that this piece of legislation will continue to maintain that principle and observe the responsibility that we all have to serve the public interest and keep the public trust uppermost in our minds.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I will now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to congratulate the government. This is probably the third time that we've addressed issues of conflict of interest and the act in this Legislature since I got in 12 years ago. I don't think we've done it

in as comprehensive a way as has been happening. In fact, along with the review of ABCs I think there's every reason to think that we're going to be developing more confidence in the public around our activities, our credibility around gifts and exchanges of favours, and issues of perceived conflict of interest.

All of these, while they kind of fly by in the busyness of our lives as we attend meetings and events and make connections with people from the business community, the NGO community – we're being evaluated constantly on the little things that they see happening. To have this much more explicit and consistent in the ABCs I think is a critically important part of our job here, and I think it will serve all of us well. I don't think there's any question that it needs to be done. This systematic review has helped us to think through some of the inconsistencies that currently exist, that I've certainly been aware of and raised as recently as last week with the minister because of concerns in my constituency about senior members of educational institutions and what's happening there.

I commend the government. This Bill 27 proposes to create a consistent set of conflict-of-interest rules for the agencies, boards, commissions, and all of the positions associated with that. The new rules will apply to board members and employees in 136 public agencies that fall under the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, including Covenant Health and three subsidiaries of Alberta Health Services; that is, Calgary Lab Services, which is an anomaly, as far as I'm concerned, and persists; CapitalCare Group; and Carewest. How these ever escaped the consistent rules for so long is beyond me. The proposed rules are similar to those that already exist for elected officials, political staff, and senior officials in the public service but clearly have been neglected.

ABCs, then, will be required to prepare and submit to the Ethics Commissioner, within four months of it coming into force, one or more codes of conduct, which the Ethics Commissioner must approve. These codes will require board members and employees of ABCs to conduct themselves impartially; to disclose real and apparent conflicts of interest; and to place restrictions or limitations on acting in self-interest, on furthering private interests, on acceptance of gifts, and on concurrent employment and other offices.

The chief executive officers or their equivalents such as board chairs and university and college presidents will be subject to restrictions on other employment. This came up very strongly in the last five years at the University of Calgary when the energy environment commission was set up there with the help of Enbridge and some of the issues that that raised around conflicts of interest. Indeed, it came up with the Calgary School of Public Policy when Jack Mintz, who continued to receive hundreds of thousands of dollars from Imperial Oil, was the director of the policy school, supposed to be independently looking at policies relating to the oil and gas industry.

It's a long-standing issue. If we take in any seriousness the notion that public trust is critical in this business and that anything we can do to improve that is to the good of democracy and to the good of our democratic health, then we have to recognize that these have been oversights, that these have been areas of neglect that are, sadly, needing remedy.

Additional requirements are applied to CEOs of significant agencies, including disclosure of financial information to the Ethics Commissioner, restrictions on the type of stocks and financial securities they can hold, and a 12-month cooling-off period following employment with a public agency to prevent CEOs from benefiting from decisions they made while in a position of influence. We all remember from June of last year the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation scandal around gifts of alcohol, theatre tickets, and unnecessary travel and the suspension of three AFSC executives.

An Alberta Health Services staffer was also accused of having a conflict of interest in 2014 after giving a \$75,000 contract to a consulting company where he had worked and still held shares. I don't think we can take this seriously enough.

Clearly, we'll be supporting this. The new rules will bring Alberta in line with jurisdictions such as Ontario, Manitoba, and the federal government, that have comprehensive codes of conduct governing agencies, boards, and commissions. The rules are part of a broader effort to standardize compensation and conflict-of-interest rules across the public sector, something that we very much support.

It makes little sense to have a consistent set of conflict-of-interest rules for part of the public sector and a patchwork of rules for agencies, boards, and commissions. Inconsistency in how conflict-of-interest rules are applied creates confusion and increases the likelihood of abuse. Agencies, boards, and commissions account for almost half of all provincial spending, so we cannot simply assume that because they are outside of the regular governance, they are following any standards without creating those, monitoring them, and holding people accountable.

Madam Speaker, I won't belabour it. It's been said by many others that this is progress, and we'll certainly be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I will now call on the Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up and speak to Bill 27, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017. We've heard a lot on this bill already from many colleagues in the House, particularly about the importance of public trust, that a previous member, Edmonton-McClung, had talked about, and I think it's important that we think about that.

3:40

In the Conflicts of Interest Act itself, I mean, right in the preamble it says:

Senior officials, members and employees of public agencies are expected to act with integrity and impartiality and must avoid conduct that violates the public trust or creates a conflict of interest or apparent conflict of interest.

If we want the public to continue to have trust in our agencies, I think that this is indeed very important.

Now, some questions came up about this bill and why I'm supporting it. You know, one of the questions is: why are we changing the Conflicts of Interest Act, and how will these changes benefit Albertans? Well, of course, we are committed to strengthening conflict-of-interest legislation and extending it to senior staff at public agencies, boards, and commissions, and that is what we are proposing to do with this legislation. While some public agencies have conflict-of-interest requirements in place due to their codes of conduct or their employment contract, there is not a consistent and comprehensive set of rules being applied to public agencies. I think it is important that we correct this, Madam Speaker.

Alberta's public agencies, as a whole, account for about half of the government's total budgetary spending, which is why they need to be held to a high ethical standard and, of course, governed with the integrity that Albertans expect. With these changes, I feel that Albertans can be confident that clear rules and expectations will be put into place to ensure that public agencies' staff and board members are acting in the public interest.

Of course, these rules are all good until somebody breaks them, so it's important that there are penalties for those who breach the

act. Currently there is just an administrative penalty for not disclosing to the Ethics Commissioner on time or for failing to disclose conflicts as outlined in the Conflicts of Interest Act. This penalty applies to those currently covered in the act, including MLAs and senior officials, and, as we know in this House, cannot exceed \$500.

It is also currently an offence for designated senior officials to violate postemployment restrictions subject to a fine of up to \$50,000. With amendments to this act, those penalties will become applicable to designated senior officials. This is in alignment with current provisions for ministers and deputy ministers who currently serve the people of Alberta.

Now, a question that has come up as well is: how will these requirements be enforced? Chairs and CEOs and equivalents would be subject to the oversight of the Ethics Commissioner for the statutory requirements that apply to them. As the deputy chair of Legislative Offices I see first-hand the hard work that our Ethics Commissioner does in enforcing the Conflicts of Interest Act as it relates to us as MLAs as well as to other agencies, and I look forward to her taking her duty seriously in enforcing the new provisions that are in this bill.

Also, the requirement for codes of conduct aligns with the approach used in the Alberta public service. The conflict-of-interest requirements for board chairs, CEOs, and equivalents align closely with those already in place for elected officials, including deputy ministers.

Lastly, after this bill passes and it comes into force, agencies will be required to send their codes of conduct to the Ethics Commissioner for review by the Ethics Commissioner within six months of this act's proclamation.

Also, Madam Speaker, there were some questions about the statutory requirements and what this means. Currently there is a two-year transition period. It is recognized that restrictions on concurrent employment, on offices and appointments, and on additional requirements may not be consistent with current employment contracts. We, of course, want to allow individuals who are in that particular position to transition out. To mitigate this, the two-year transition period will of course be utilized prior to those new requirements taking effect or, of course, upon a new contract or a new contract renewal, whichever one comes first.

To end off my comments, I believe that Bill 27 is a good bill that does much to restore public confidence and trust in our agencies, boards, and commissions, and I, of course, encourage all members of the House to vote for this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing – oh, 29(2)(a) first, please.

Seeing none, I will now call on the hon. member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Not to be repetitive, seeing as how so many people had such good things to say already, but I stand to support the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017, Bill 27. I take it very seriously, the trust that the public has in both their elected officials and the agencies, boards, and commissions that the government has. They're so important to and such an important part of the lives of Albertans.

The executives and board members need to be held to the same ethical standards expected of MLAs and senior public servants. Ethical standards is an interesting topic because we can assume that we all know what is the right thing to do in all the various situations, but it's easy to, you know, change assumptions as time goes on or as the situation changes. Having the rules and having the codes of

conduct laid out not in prescriptive detail but general enough so everyone knows what the expectations are of their behaviour makes it a lot more likely that everyone will behave accordingly. Any time we have a situation where we are working for the public, we do need to make sure that we are expecting everybody to behave responsibly in that position.

Trust is essential, and that's been emphasized at different times, but I'm also in favour of consistency, making sure that we can presume that the people that we trust in these positions will behave appropriately. Having the oversights and codes of conduct in place, too, is really helpful for our new appointees. We're always having people that are asking about it, especially if they want to get involved in public service, and we talk about openings on various agencies, boards, and commissions. If people know what the expectations are, then they know what is expected of them, and they walk in with their eyes wide open. Again, it's the transparency thing. They know what is expected of them. Knowing that, for instance, there's a cooling-off period in certain positions. CEOs and equivalents are expected to abide by a 12-month cooling-off period following employment with a public agency. That's really important information to have, knowing that they have to disclose to the Ethics Commissioner on a regular basis.

Having timelines for instituting the codes of conduct makes sure that people aren't procrastinating or just putting it to one side as not being very important. It makes sure that everybody is treating the codes of conduct and the conflict-of-interest rules as serious and important to the operation of the various ABCs.

I really am proud of this bill. I'm very in favour of it. It is transparent. It will aid in transparency. As one validator said here, a large part of agency governance is setting a level playing field and clear expectations as to what practices are and are not acceptable. This legislation does just that by setting clear parameters and expectations for executives and board members of agencies, so I support this bill and certainly hope that everyone else will.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

3:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to close debate on behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As always, it's a pleasure to get up in this House and speak on behalf of the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, a good friend of mine. We see eye to eye on many things. Of course, I want to applaud the incredible work that this government has done in the review of the agencies, boards, and commissions. Now, you may say, "Okay; yes, you've done a considerable amount of work here," but of course I want to highlight specifically the major change that we've been able to implement with the review of the agencies, boards, and commissions and, specifically, with Bill 27 and how we're expanding the conflict-of-interest rules to the ABCs.

One of the things I'd like to state before is that all this work is focused around four major themes: transparency; fiscal accountability of the agencies, boards, and commissions; fair and appropriate executive compensation; and perhaps the most important, to me at least, diversity.

You know, earlier today, Madam Speaker, you gave an excellent member's statement regarding the Métis Nation of Alberta and the culture that it's going to be celebrating over the next few days here

in the province of Alberta. I want to share a small story with you, actually.

One of the things that I was very honoured and proud to do with one of the new schools that opened up in the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie was to go to the school opening and gift them three things. One of them, of course, was the flag of our province, the Alberta flag. The second was the Treaty 6 flag so that they could hoist it up when necessary, when they thought it was important to do so. Then, of course, the last one was the Métis Nation flag. I want to say thank you very much to one of their executive directors, a good friend of mine who actually lives in my constituency, Mr. Aaron Barner. I got a wonderful text from Aaron, one that really just filled my heart with so much happiness.

First of all, he sent me a picture. They had hoisted the Métis Nation flag along with the Alberta flag in front of the school, and guess who was standing in front of those flags? His children. His children were standing in front of those flagpoles with that Métis Nation flag up there. He wrote me, and he said: Rod, I'm so happy because I spoke to the principal at the school, and he told me that you were the one that gave them the Métis Nation flag, and you made two young children very proud of their culture.

Why is this important and, specifically, how does it relate to the Métis Nation? Well, guess what? Years and years and years ago there was a man named Louis Riel, who we'll be celebrating right here in this Legislature on Thursday morning. Now, Louis Riel was the leader of the provisional government at that time, and do you know one of the main reasons why they had a provisional government? They did not feel that they were being represented.

Now, you may say: okay; well, how does this apply to conflicts of interest, to Alberta agencies, boards, and commissions? Well, it has to do with this issue of diversity. It has to do with this very important issue of diversity and the culture that was created within the agencies, boards, and commissions up to the date when we started to review the ABCs.

My hon. colleague here from Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater got up and said: oh, well, you know, it's an old boys' club that used to exist; they would just appoint each other to these different agencies, boards, and commissions. You know, I think he was being really kind when he just kind of tapped the surface by saying old boys' club. We can say that it was . . .

Mr. Rosendahl: More than that.

Loyola: Indeed. It was indeed more than just an old boys' club, but I will reserve my comments because, you know, I don't want to create discord here in the House, unlike some of the other colleagues with statements that they make.

But I will say this. The time has come for agencies, boards, and commissions in this province to start a new culture, a new culture where there is more transparency, there is more fiscal accountability, there is fair and appropriate executive compensation, and, yes, also increased diversity amongst all these agencies, boards, and commissions as we continue to move forward.

You know, one of the other things that I'd like to say is that usually government is supposed to be setting the example by creating codes of conduct. Those codes of conduct that are implemented at this level are then followed by other organizations within our society: nonprofit organizations, unions, you name it. They can see the example that the government of Alberta is setting and make the changes as they continue to grow and strengthen their institutions.

But I've got to say that after 44 years of Conservative government in this province that was not the case. In fact, it was going the other way around. Nonprofits and other institutions

within our society were creating codes of conduct, making sure that there was no conflict of interest among their boards, and they were setting the example so that finally we could catch up and make the changes at this level, here in the government of Alberta. After 44 years of Conservative government here in this province I'm glad that it took an NDP government to come into power and start making these changes. This is the kind of leadership that Albertans want to see. This is the kind of leadership that requires vision.

As you, Madam Speaker, I'm also of mixed blood. Not of this country, but I self-identify as an indigenous person as well, and I'm proud of that indigenous heritage. It's not only here in North America, or what Anglos call North America, that indigenous people look seven generations down the road. You know, that's a practice of many, many, many indigenous groups throughout the entire world. You're looking at seven generations. When you make a decision, you're asking: how is this going to impact the children, the grandchildren, the great-grandchildren and so on and so on? Well, I'm glad that this government has come into power here and is finally working on getting this correct.

You know, I look forward to the day when we can be proud to see not 10 per cent – it's not even that yet – or 20 per cent or 30 per cent but when we see that 50 per cent of the people who are making up agencies, boards, and commissions are people who are racialized people in this province, when the people of Alberta look at not only their government but also their democratic institutions within their society and can see themselves reflected in those institutions. But for that, Madam Speaker, we require more transparency, and we require more diversity because the culture has to change.

Now, I'm not going to say that it's going to change overnight just by the passing of this one bill because it takes more than that. You and I both know that, Madam Speaker. You and I both know that it takes, yes, implementing legislation but then also going out there and having the conversations with people so that they can see and so that, as I was saying before, through the work that they do through nonprofit organizations in this province, they can tell us how we can improve and strengthen these institutions.

4:00

Many hon. members have spoken to this bill already, but I feel that it's absolutely necessary to highlight just a few aspects of this bill before we end today. Of course, Alberta's public agencies account for about half of the government's total budgetary spending. With these changes Alberta can be confident that public agency staff, board members are acting in the public interest.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung spoke at length about the importance of the public trust. I would say – and I go back to that whole issue of diversity – that in order to have that public trust, Albertans have to see themselves reflected in our institutions.

It's vitally important that our public agencies are held to the same high standards that we expect of our elected officials and senior public servants. This bill proposes that public agencies that are already subject to the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act would also be subject to the Conflicts of Interest Act. Again, this goes back to the issue of transforming the culture that we currently have in this province, one where people didn't feel represented by the institutions.

The changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act would require all public agencies to have a code of conduct that includes the following prescribed elements. These are a requirement to conduct themselves impartially; restrictions on acting in self-interest or furthering private interest by virtue of one's position; disclosure of real and apparent conflicts of interest; restrictions on gifts, including monetary limits; and limitations on concurrent employment with other offices, including processes for seeking approval.

All APAGA agencies would be required to submit updated codes of conduct reflecting these prescribed elements to the Ethics Commissioner within four months of the act being proclaimed. The Ethics Commissioner will review all revised codes to ensure that they meet the requirements of the act and sign off by March 31, 2019. Agencies would then have to publish their new codes of conduct no later than April 30, 2019. As you can see, Madam Speaker, this is a process, a process by which we are engaging in this path towards transforming the culture that was long established by Conservatives here in this province. It's going to take a while, but we'll get there. We'll change that culture.

The legislation also proposes a set of core statutory requirements for CEOs and board chairs. These requirements include restrictions on private interest, restrictions on using influence, restrictions on using insider information, and disclosure of real and apparent conflicts of interest.

CEOs and equivalents of significant agencies would also be subject to additional statutory requirements upon designation, including restrictions on holding stocks and other public securities; disclosure to the Ethics Commissioner, including financial disclosure; and postemployment restrictions, specifically a 12-month cooling-off period following employment with a public agency. These additional statutory requirements would be set out in the act, but the positions that they would apply to would be designated in a separate order in council and come into effect on contract renewals and new appointments.

Where current contracts are longer term, a two-year transition period would apply, so within two years all CEOs and board chairs will be subject to these enhanced requirements.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 23 Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and move third reading of Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017, on behalf of my colleague the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Kathleen Ganley.

As we've discussed . . .

Hon. Members: Name.

Mr. Shepherd: Oh, I apologize. I withdraw that name and will attempt to read a little further ahead in my notes before speaking.

Bill 23, as we've discussed here in the House, would add age as a prohibited ground of discrimination to the Alberta Human Rights Act under sections 4 and 5 of the act. These sections, as we've discussed, include the areas of tenancy, goods, services, accommodation, and facilities. Now, Madam Speaker, this government supports all Albertans, which is why we're proposing to strengthen our current human rights legislation and further protect Albertans from age discrimination.

Earlier this year the government of Alberta agreed to a court order to make these changes. During the one-year period provided by the courts, our government took the time to ensure that we had a comprehensive understanding of the different perspectives surrounding this issue. Based upon what we heard, we're working

to ensure that the specific types of age distinctions can continue without violating the Alberta Human Rights Act.

In regard to seniors' exemptions, first, it's important to note that this legislation will allow programs that provide benefits to minors and seniors, such as discounted movie tickets or reduced bus fares, to continue.

Second, we recognize that older Albertans may choose to live together in a community of people who are at a similar stage in life and may require similar supports. Therefore, Bill 23 would protect the ability of seniors to live in seniors-only housing, with the minimum age cut-off set at age 55.

We were pleased to hear support from members of the House, especially on the exceptions for seniors-only housing and for programs and activities that provide a benefit to seniors and minors. Many Albertans also expressed their support for these exceptions during our consultations.

Bill 23 also grants existing age-restricted condominiums a 15-year transition period. We recognize that many Albertans have made significant investments based on condo bylaws that were in place at the time that they made their purchase. The 15-year transition period is meant to provide notice so that Albertans who are affected by these changes have the opportunity to make informed decisions about where they wish to live.

In addition to the age-related amendments, we also want to allow for ameliorative programs and activities. These programs such as those that support inclusive and diverse workplaces improve situations for disadvantaged people. An example of this would be an employment program for indigenous youth.

We recognize the need to ensure that Albertans are made aware of these changes. Certainly, that's something that's been discussed here in the House and that's been brought up during the debate. If Bill 23 is passed, our government will be actively reaching out to Albertans who shared their views about this issue. We will also work with the Alberta Human Rights Commission to ensure that this information is publicly available through their many programs and services. They promote much of this information online, which they use to educate and engage with Albertans and organizations, and we have already posted information about this legislation on the government of Alberta website. Indeed, Madam Speaker, I've had the opportunity to make use of that in responding to my own constituents who have written in looking for clarification and looking for opportunities to be able to link to that information and share with others in their condominiums.

If passed, Madam Speaker, this bill will come into force on January 1, 2018.

4:10

Madam Speaker, we are committed to enhancing every Albertan's ability to fully and equally participate in our society, and our government supports all Albertans. We believe that these changes will indeed make life better for them. We believe that the proposed amendments strike the right balance between the interests of many different groups while enhancing human rights protection and embracing diversity in Alberta. I ask that all members support me in moving third reading.

Continuing, I'd like to take the opportunity while I'm here and while I've had the opportunity to rise to discuss a few questions that have arisen during the debate and, indeed, that I've heard about from my constituents to ensure that we have a full understanding of the steps this legislation would take. There has been some discussion around the issue of mandatory retirement and pension plans, how that would be addressed under this legislation and whether the integrity of the bona fide pension plans that have mandatory retirement provisions would be addressed in the

regulations phase. To this I can note that age is already a prohibited ground of discrimination under the act in the context of employment. Bill 23 does not change anything in that regard, so that protection remains in place.

In terms of questions around whether we're protecting the rights of seniors to a fair and reasonable evaluation for fitness in operating a motor vehicle, indeed I was just speaking with the Member for Calgary-Currie this morning, and he was telling me of his grandfather's journey with that and sort of working through that process. We certainly recognize that it's an issue that comes to light for many seniors as they age and still want to be able to get around their community, get to the places they need to go. Well, all drivers regardless of age are legally required to report any medical conditions that may affect their ability to drive safely. Currently there is required a medical report to be signed by a physician at the age of 75 years, at the age of 80 years, and every two years after the age of 80. Their doctor may also recommend that they take a road test or further testing before they approve that medical form.

Once age is added to section 4 of the act, anyone who feels that the existing regime discriminates on the basis of age would have the option to reach out to the commission to discuss bringing a complaint. Now, section 11 of the act does permit practices that are reasonable and justifiable in circumstances to continue without violating the act. We believe that the existing practices fall under that defence and that no further amendments, therefore, to the act are needed at this time.

In regard to tax benefits for seniors, speaking of things such as income splitting and asking whether those would be excluded in the exemptions of benefits for minors and seniors, sections 4 and 5 of the act currently are specific to the areas of tenancy, goods, services, accommodation, and facilities. Therefore, Bill 23 does not impact tax benefits since those are not addressed in those sections, so things such as income splitting and other aspects of the tax regime will not be affected in any way by this bill.

There have been some discussion and some questions around rental car agencies and how some of the concerns that have been brought forward by insurance companies in regard to their ability to use age as one of their factors in assessing rates and coverage options would be addressed and whether they can use the relevant and actual data regarding age to help determine insurance premiums. Well, in that regard, Madam Speaker, I can say once again, as I noted earlier, that section 11 of the act does permit practices that are considered to be reasonable and justifiable in the circumstances to continue without being considered to violate the act.

That's the approach that's been taken to date in Alberta for discrimination in the insurance industry on the basis of gender and physical disability, for example, because we do know that young men, for example, are often charged higher insurance rates than young women because they're statistically found to have more incidents. Once age is added to section 4, this type of analysis could also be applied in the context of age discrimination for car rental agencies. That means that age distinctions are permitted where legally justifiable. That would be something, then, that would be up to the commission and the courts to determine.

In regard to specific lists of benefits currently offered to minors and seniors, whether those will be created or whether the exemptions are going to be more of a blanket statement, at this point on the exception for programs and activities that offer benefits to seniors and minors, the intention is to go with more of a blanket exemption as opposed to trying to cover all of the ifs, ands, whats, and possibilities.

As I mentioned, there have been some questions about how this information will be communicated to Albertans, and certainly,

Madam Speaker, I recognize that this is a significant change and one that impacts many stakeholders across our province, including renters, landlords, building owners, property managers, so it's essential that we make sure this information is clearly communicated and made available to the public so that they understand both what their rights are and what their responsibilities are.

When we first proposed this legislation, Minister Ganley did hold a news conference to explain how the legislation would work if passed.

An Hon. Member: Names.

Mr. Shepherd: Oh, pardon me. I apologize.

The Minister of Justice – I'm withdrawing the name – held a news conference to explain how the legislation would work if passed. We've also listed the proposed legislation and the impacts on the government website, and indeed, Madam Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, I can say that it is a fairly robust and clear explanation that I've found very useful in reaching out to my own constituents. We will also, then, be reaching out to Albertans who contacted us, so everybody who wrote in to provide their thoughts to the minister and through the survey will be hearing back from the government as to the changes that would be in place if this bill should pass.

Again, we will work with the Alberta Human Rights Commission, who does some excellent work around education in the province and does a great job of posting this information on their website, to ensure that we're utilizing that resource in every way possible to make sure all Albertans are aware of the changes.

Now, another issue that has come up and that indeed I've heard raised, I think, by some of my other colleagues from Calgary and here in Edmonton is in regard to the changing of bylaws on condo boards.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

Certainly, we recognize that in order for condominium corporations to decide whether they're going to move to 55-plus or indeed whether they may choose instead to simply remove age restrictions, that may require a change in their bylaws. The question has been asked whether that could be just simply done via amendments to those bylaws. As in regard to all areas covered by the act, it is up to those who are subject to the act to conduct themselves in compliance, but we are giving that transition period of 15 years, which allows condominiums to amend their bylaws so they're in compliance with the law. It's a reasonable process. It's something I know we're going through with in the condominium building where I own a suite and rent that out. We're working with lawyers here in the city to update our bylaws. It's not too onerous a process, but if condominium associations and condo residents do have questions, they can of course contact Service Alberta's consumer contact centre, and that phone number is available online at servicealberta.ca. There are also some condo tipsheets there, which may provide some further information on how they could go about that process.

Now, there were also some questions, as I understand, in regard to provisions for 55-plus, in regard to only one member of a household having to be 55-plus in order to be grandparenting or being able to remain in an age-restricted building. There have been some questions, I guess, asking about the fact that that could then mean that you have very mixed-generational tenants in a building if only one individual, say, is over the age of 55 and then you have, you know, their son and his partner and their children all living there in an age-restricted building because one person is 55 years old. On that, I would just note that the lowest age restriction, as we've said, that would meet the seniors-only housing exception is that one person needs to be 55. That's the rule that's set out through

the legislation. However, landlords and condominium complexes are free to choose a higher age restriction if they wish. They could choose to set it at 60 or 65. They could set it at any age above 55.

For example, the age limitation could be set at 60, or the age restriction could specify that only spouses or adult interdependent partners younger than 55 would be allowed. Condominium corporations retain the right to have a bit of flexibility there, to define things for what would best suit their building. We've tried to build that in and accommodate that in any way that we can within this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that I do fully support. I think it's important that we offer Albertans the same human rights protections that all other Canadians enjoy. And as I've been clear about in my previous statements, this is a bill that I feel is beneficial for my constituency. I have heard from some constituents who have some concerns about losing access to age-restricted facilities, but I think the provisions that we've provided here, the fact that we are offering that grandparenting for 15 years, recognize that some buildings are simply not going to prove attractive to families simply because they only have one- and two-bedroom suites, perhaps because of their location, because of their lack of other amenities that are attractive to families.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, this is going to open up all sorts of new possibilities for downtown Edmonton. As I said earlier, in downtown Edmonton right now we're just on the cusp. We're about 50 per cent of the way to the sort of population density we need to have a truly vibrant and thriving downtown economy that really supports the kinds of services that people are looking for like grocery stores, child care centres, active schools. Grandin elementary school, just a couple of blocks from here, is undersubscribed by over 100 students. This opportunity for us to have more families living in our urban communities, something that many millennials are very interested in, is a great benefit for our community.

As we're working also to attract new businesses to our city and new young professionals, many of them are interested in that urban lifestyle. We want to bring these businesses to downtown Edmonton and downtown Calgary, too, to help fill that vacancy rate. Many of these young professionals want to live nearer to their work, to take advantage of our new downtown bike grid here in Edmonton or the bike grid in Calgary. I have to shamefully admit that you beat us to that one, but we appreciated the example, the ground that you broke for us so that we could move forward on that, too. These steps help make Alberta a more family-friendly and indeed, as a result, business-friendly place.

I'm very happy to stand in support of this bill. I deeply appreciate the work that the Minister of Justice, whose name I will not mention, did in consulting on this bill and talking with stakeholders and really, I think, finding a good balance that's going to allow all of us to move forward to protect those rights that we need to have for Albertans and allow them to enjoy the same rights as all other Canadians while having as minimal an impact as we can on those who bought their homes and were operating under the previous regulations.

Thank you again to the minister. Thank you to everyone who's spoken in support of this bill. I look forward to voting in support at the end of third reading.

The Acting Speaker: The chair will recognize the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and honour to rise and speak in favour of Bill 23. Speaking

immediately after the Member for Edmonton-Centre I think is a good place to pick up.

One of the things that one of my hon. colleagues here and I were talking about earlier is that this bill has managed to do a very good job of finding the right balance on what is a very complex issue. As I'm sure a lot of my hon. colleagues have found, our constituency offices, especially those of us in inner-city, urban constituencies, although it's certainly not limited to that, have received a lot of feedback on this legislation, at least certainly initially. There was a lot of concern that there was going to be an overreach in reaction to a bill that is ostensibly to respond to a court ruling. In this case I think the government has got it right. They found the balance, and it is just remarkable, Mr. Speaker, that in this Assembly there actually are some issues that aren't purely black and white, where, actually, we can find some middle ground and some thoughtful nuance.

Having heard from many of my constituents, I'm certainly very happy to be able to respond to them that, in fact, the bill does meet the court-mandated changes without overreaching and does provide protections, especially to older Albertans, so I'm very happy to support the bill.

Given that the court order came down back in January 2017, of course, we knew that these changes needed to be made, and it brings Alberta into line with the rest of the country. I always have a red flag go up every time I hear that Alberta is the only province or one of the only provinces that does or doesn't do a certain thing. That's always an area for further investigation, and this is another one of those areas where we were, in fact, one of only two provinces that did not have age read into our provincial human rights code. Now, with the courts having done that for us, this legislation makes that change official.

I do want to thank everyone who has reached out both to my constituency office and, I know, to many other members to provide feedback. There was a very comprehensive and thoughtful consultation process on what is a very complex issue, and I'm happy to know that this bill will pass. It does recognize that Albertans over the age of 55 may opt out or opt to live together in a community of people with the same interests and the same age demographic, and that 15-year grace period does give Albertans an opportunity to transition into the new rules.

Condo owners consulted along the process strongly indicated that individuals should have a choice in their housing and lifestyle decisions, and this legislation, including exemptions for seniors-only housing, does mean that buildings can cater exclusively to those over 55, and that phase-in period allows people who are now currently in their 40s to move into that senior age bracket. Condo owners now, then, therefore have more than a decade to phase in the new rules, but renters, of course, will notice the changes as of the 1st of January of next year.

The point I wanted to make on that is that this does seem to, again, strike the right balance between allowing Albertans choice in their housing but also recognizing that there are families who will choose to live in condos and apartments. It does expand the housing options for those families. While I certainly have heard from some landlords who are concerned about that, I believe that any issues or challenges that may be faced by landlords are far outweighed by the benefits to Albertans, who now have more housing options. In striking that balance, where we cannot meet the needs or the requests of both sides of an issue, I think that in this case we've come down on the right side of this issue by allowing more housing options in a way that I don't believe greatly impairs the ability of a landlord to make a living or to rent out their buildings.

Other exemptions in the bill, the ameliorative programs – for example, buildings set aside to help members of a vulnerable

population – of course, are necessary and welcome, programs such as employment or internship programs for youth. Prior to the introduction of this legislation, again, we were the only province whose human rights legislation did not provide an exemption for ameliorative programs or activities, and again I'm very happy to see that. We ensure in this legislation that the proposed amendments ensure that programs providing a benefit to minors and seniors such as discounted movie tickets, those sorts of things, are in fact allowed to continue.

Given all of that, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Party caucus is very proud to support this bill, and I look forward to voting in favour in third reading. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today in support of Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. I'm not going to comment on the bill in its entirety. I'm going to focus more on the real estate elements of it, that I've had a fair bit of experience in and also that I've had the opportunity to speak with constituents about at length during the course of the deliberations over the bill.

Bill 23, as we have heard other speakers say, would add age as a prohibited ground for discrimination to the Alberta Human Rights Act under the areas of tenancy, goods and services, and accommodations or facilities. Now, earlier this year the government of Alberta agreed to a court order to make these changes, and it's important to note that it was a court order that required that these changes be made. In accommodating and reacting to this court order and accepting the court order, one wants to be careful as a government that one doesn't open oneself up to further court challenges, and that's why it's very important to respond in a way that where you're implementing reasonable exemptions to the court order, you choose those exemptions in a way that is going to pass the test of the courts. Now, of course, somebody could challenge down the road, but you do your best at this point in creating the legislation to ensure that to the best extent possible you avoid court challenges that might be successful.

What I wanted to speak about in particular, as you, Mr. Speaker, may be guessing by now, would be with respect to the age limits in seniors' condominiums, in particular in owned condominiums. As the House knows, I've sold real estate for over 30 years, and I sold many, many condominiums with various different age restrictions. The common age points that one would find in Alberta in these condominiums which would have age restrictions on them would be 18-plus, 45-plus, 50-plus, and then 55-plus. These were the most common age points that condominium associations or developers/builders would place on their buildings when they sold. Then furthermore, unless the condominium association decided to change them, those would be the age restrictions that would govern the sale of those units to prospective successive buyers.

4:30

In choosing 55 as the age limit at which we would consider it to be a reasonable exemption, I think, in my personal view, that the considerations that were made were well considered. If you add 40 plus 15, you get 55. I mentioned the different age breaks that were there. Many of the units you'll see are 45-plus. Indeed, we've grandfathered the condominiums which have age restrictions right now to a 15-year period, so beyond the 15-year period they will have to adopt 55 or higher as an age limit for the condominium association, giving plenty of time to transition to the new restriction, which satisfies the court order. It will allow people who

are living in these condominiums the ability to age in place up to and beyond the 55-plus age limit.

I think that in setting the age limit to 55, what we're doing – and this is my interpretation of things – is protecting the quiet enjoyment in retirement years for those individuals who wish to be among those of 55-plus in age versus prohibiting younger people from becoming residents. I think that's probably the choice or the decision point that courts may make if there are subsequent challenges, Mr. Speaker. The subsequent challenges may actually be based upon that determination, whether indeed the intent of the legislation was to protect quiet enjoyment in retirement years or whether the intent was to prohibit younger people or ban them from becoming residents.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

That's a critical point, in my view, in suggesting that the 55 age limit was the right age limit to fall upon, where I think it can be argued effectively in any subsequent court challenge that 55-plus is meant to protect the quiet enjoyment of people in retirement years who wish to live together with folks of similar age or older versus a desire to prohibit little feet or young adults or partygoing 18-pluses from being residents in their condominiums. Once again, the reasonable exemptions must potentially avoid court challenges. This 15-year phase-out, I think, was a proper number to arrive at because it allows people to age in place even if they are starting at a 40-plus age limit in a building they're in.

Certainly, not everybody is going to be happy. I did have a town hall in one of my very large 55-plus condominium complexes in my constituency, and during that town hall there were, I believe, 90 people who attended, and 82 was the average age. I think they gave up precious time coming from their suites down to the lobby, forgoing their afternoon session of watching the Legislative Assembly, to come to that town hall and discuss their concerns about the protection they thought they might be losing from the 55-plus age limit. I know that they were very, very pleased to know that that 55-plus age limit will be preserved as a result of this legislation and, I believe, preserved in a way which would survive a potential court challenge in the future.

It's a complex issue, and it affects a lot of Albertans. I know this is probably the most contentious issue in the legislation. It was from my perspective. I know the Alberta Real Estate Association seriously consulted with its members and made representations on the issue. I know that there are still some individuals attempting to lobby to reduce the age restriction to a lower number. But I think the 55-plus number is the right number, and I believe that it will survive a court challenge. A lower number, I think, would be at risk of not being successfully defended in the courts. I'm glad that we did land on this 15-year grandfathering time frame and the 55-plus age limit or age ceiling.

I wanted to mention that the number of individuals in my constituency who are in 55-plus residences number in the hundreds. They can be in adult bungalows, they could be in high rises, or they could be in more of a seniors' assisted living situation. But there are lots and lots of people in not only the downtown area but also in the suburbs, where my constituency is located, who really appreciate the fact that this 55-plus age limit will be protected in this legislation and that it will, in my view, survive a court challenge that might be deemed to be inevitable by some parties who still feel that they want a lower limit in place, especially in owner-occupied condominiums.

However, one thing I wanted to comment on as well is the fact that we've actually grandfathered this in. I think it's a really good idea to do it. Some have argued that the age limit should have been

protected in perpetuity for existing buildings which had an age limit, whether it had been 18-plus or 45-plus, 50-plus, or 55-plus, whatever the case may be. Some have argued that we should maybe keep that in perpetuity, but in fact what it would have done, if you really think this through, is that it would have created a class of properties, whether it be in Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, wherever they happen to be, which would have been unique in their nature and probably escalate in market value because of their rareness and make them an unusual and rare bird, which would create a bit of an anomaly in the market.

I don't think it would have survived a court challenge either. It really wouldn't have been a great idea to not grandfather these in and to have a final date where the 55-plus was the minimum age limit at which you could restrict residency. Then you don't have the complication in the future of court cases which would end up having one forced to revisit the whole issue all over again. Once again, you don't know for sure. Somebody could file a court challenge about anything, but I believe we are safe at age 55-plus in terms of being able to survive a court challenge, this reasonable exemption to the court order.

Once again, I believe that over time people will get used to this. There will be some objections to it. There will be a little bit of an adjustment period. But it was a court-ordered demand that Alberta responded to, and it's something that we have the most respect for in this province and, I think, in all provinces: human rights legislation. When a court order insisted that we comply, we didn't challenge it. We chose to respect the Human Rights Act and the courts and make accommodations with reasonable exceptions so that people who are over 55 can reasonably enjoy their retirement in housing with other people of similar age. At the same time, we're not prohibiting younger people from accommodating themselves in buildings that they would like to live in that might suit their purposes and which otherwise would be unavailable to them.

For those and many other reasons I support this piece of legislation, and I ensure that I'll do my very best to explain to my constituents who still might have some reservations about it the reasons why it's necessary to follow the court's demands and ensure that this balance between the different age groups is struck and that we move forward to continue looking to accommodate each other in this society we so dearly love.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the bill?
The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

4:40

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to the third reading of Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. Our caucus, the United Conservative Party, does support the spirit of this bill and the fact that we do recognize that it will bring Alberta in line with the rest of the country.

Canada: we are known as a world leader in progressive, nondiscriminatory policy in human rights, and I am proud to support any legislation that reflects that. But that said, I just wanted to say briefly with Bill 23 that I do not believe that the people who built these buildings had discriminatory thoughts in their heads when they were doing this. I will challenge that when they were using age as a definition of who can live in their buildings, it was more to address a lifestyle, and they're using age to identify a certain lifestyle of people that wanted to live in a certain building that was perhaps quieter or whatnot or that fit their lifestyles.

I would also argue that . . .

Mr. Dach: Age is not a choice.

Mr. Yao: Tell me about it.

I'd argue that, again, these apartment buildings and these developments: it wasn't their intent to discriminate. Their intent was that they've identified a market, a group of individuals who were willing to invest in a home that suited their lifestyles, and I think everyone in this room can appreciate that we are all slightly different and that birds of a feather stick together.

I mean, I had a fellow who came straight from East India who came up to Fort McMurray. I was talking to him, a lovely man, and he asked me, "Tany, where should I live in town here?" I asked, "What are you talking about?" "Well, where do the brown people live?" That's what he asked me. I told him, "I honestly don't know, but maybe we can ask some others." But that's what he was looking for. He wanted his kids surrounded by other kids who spoke his mother tongue, and I respect and appreciate that.

Again, with this bill, though, we do recognize that there is a discriminatory angle to this and that we need to keep that door open because I myself would feel very discriminated against if a building chose to have some sort of a basis on colour, or maybe they didn't want politicians in there. I don't know, but the point is that there are many lines in the sand that we can cross that hint on discriminatory practices. That's why we fight discrimination, and that's why we need to allow this bill, because it is the foot in the door for discriminatory practices.

Certainly, in our buildings here we have all sorts of discriminatory practices. All along this Federal building here that we have our offices in, they have "no dog" signs everywhere. You know, it is sad, and it is unfortunate. I can only assume that it was the government side that put these signs up because they hate dogs so much. I would bring my dog in because he actually does give me comfort and helps me deal with certain stresses even though he is not official. That is one example of where I felt discriminated against because of what happened at the Federal building and what the government's objectives are with that.

With that said, in conclusion, I guess, we do have to be worried about discrimination. We do have to ensure that it's fought at every angle and in every possible way, and we need to ensure that we maintain a country that does have nondiscriminatory policies throughout.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak. Again, we do support this bill and recognize the aspects of it, but we also have to recognize the nuances in which these developers were building these buildings, and I appreciate that there is a grandfathering clause of sorts that allows 15 years for these buildings to convert over. In the end, yes, I support this bill.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I was so enthralled by what you had to say, especially about dogs. You spoke about the UCP perspective on the bill itself and how you support the bill, but I'm interested in knowing a little bit more about how the UCP supports access to housing for all people and what you would like to see as we continue to move forward. Of course, the bill specifically is addressing the fact that we need to create more spaces and more access for, I would even argue, young families, those people who are in their thirtysomethings, you know. Maybe you already have one child, perhaps even two. They need more spaces to live. Of course, accompanying that is also the fact that we

need to create affordable housing here in the province of Alberta. So I'm interested in knowing a little bit more about what the UCP stance is on both these aspects that the bill is really trying to create.

Now, of course, at the end of the day, you've heard me get up and speak to this bill before, specifically around the collective human right of housing. Like that of education and health care, housing is also very important, so on this side of the House we're really focused on trying to make sure to address all these issues, and we understand that the best way that you can address poverty or, better stated, poverty reduction is by first making sure that people are housed within our society. I'm very eager to hear what the hon. member has to say, what the stance of the UCP is on access to housing specifically for young families and, of course, those for whom housing is out of reach and who require affordable housing.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, this is a bill that I was very happy to see come forward. Shortly after the election this was something that I looked into myself as the potential for a private member's bill. [interjections] Hon. member, through the chair, please. Thank you. Apparently, that's hilarious. Anyway, I was very concerned about this myself.

There are, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre was talking about, many people my age who have a hard time finding housing that they can afford, and a lot of that comes down to a lot of the affordable housing being either already full or designated often as 45-plus or in many cases 18-plus. Now, the challenge with that is that when you have somebody fresh out of university looking for a job and also trying to find a house, often they're moving cities, and they're trying to find work in their field. They are trying to get established, but they can't find a house, or they can't find long-term housing. In some cases they're lucky and they can find a six-month rental, but then, you know, six months down the road they're back looking. They're looking for housing, and they don't have the stability to really focus on their career. This is something that they're very concerned about, this access to housing based on their age. So I was happy to see that this bill was coming forward, but there was also some concern about what this will look like.

You know, there are a lot of great facilities that are fairly called seniors' facilities, seniors' housing. They're not supportive, but they are built with seniors in mind. They are usually at grade, have an accessible washroom. Some but not all will have things like a walk-in shower, all of the typical things you would think of in a facility specifically built for seniors. Many of these communities were concerned that with age discrimination being added into the Human Rights Act, they wouldn't be allowed to continue as they currently exist.

4:50

One example of these facilities is the Grove Seniors Village in my constituency. They're a 55-plus co-op. The Member for Sherwood Park visited I think it was last year and was very impressed with their model. I've been there a few times myself, and they do a lot of great work for the community. Their primary focus is creating housing and community for residents over the age of 55, and they do that very well. All of their facilities are at grade, no stairs. In my times there I haven't found a single flight of stairs except down to the storage room at one of the facilities. I think maybe some of the furnaces are downstairs, but, you know, the residents aren't often going down there anyway. This is good to see,

that they are allowed to continue. I keep wanting to say that they're grandfathered in, but when we're talking about seniors' villages, that seems a bit punny.

I'm very happy to see that this is coming forward. I'm happy to see that there's the compromise there between, you know, allowing for the 55-plus facilities and for programs. Like the hon. member was saying earlier with movie tickets and such, I'm glad to see that there's that compromise between making sure that seniors' facilities and programs are still functional but that younger residents in particular and residents with families can still find housing and have access to many of those programs and housing that they really need, especially when they're first getting established in a new city or a new industry.

I wanted to thank the Minister of Justice for bringing this bill forward. I look forward to everybody voting in support in third reading and passing this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Pleased to have the first opportunity to speak to Bill 23, a fine balance, I think, based on some of the concerns expressed in my constituency and beyond, where people feel a legitimate concern around, especially, over 55s and needing to have a certain cultural and environmental ambience that they are comfortable with and at the same time recognizing that other restrictions on young families with children shouldn't be a basis for discrimination.

I think the government has found a nice balance here with respect to the Human Rights Act historically protecting against age discrimination in the areas of applications and notices; employment practices and advertisements; membership in trade unions, employers' organizations, or occupational associations. Age was not a protected ground in relation to the provision of goods, services, accommodation, or facilities customarily available to the public in relation to tenancies.

The court ruling stems from a constitutional challenge to the Human Rights Act initiated by Ruth Adria, who is a well-known seniors' advocate here, motivated by concerns about discrimination against the elderly in the areas of services and tenancies. I haven't heard from her since, but certainly she's been a very strong advocate here for a number of years. I think this addresses many of the concerns that she's had.

With respect to the Human Rights Act, though, I've repeatedly over the years raised other issues that need to be addressed under the Human Rights Act and discrimination based on some other common characteristics, I guess I would say. The minister, I would say, two years ago indicated that they were going to look at those issues as well, and I fear that it's now too late in this to again address some of these issues that have to do with constraints such as indigenous heritage; social condition, which can still be used as a means of discrimination because it's not explicitly identified in the Human Rights Act; language in this case; and pregnancy.

There are a few provinces that have tried to address some of these issues in their legislation. Pregnancy, for example, is an explicitly protected ground in Quebec and Nunavut, and variants are found in Manitoba and the Yukon, but it has not been explicitly identified beyond that. I think there's opportunity here, if we do indeed address some of these issues through the Human Rights Act in future, that we consider that.

Social condition is another explicitly protected ground in Quebec, New Brunswick, and the Northwest Territories but, again, not here in Alberta. Social condition is a broader descriptor. Rather than being someone on public assistance, it includes anyone who is low income or living in poverty. I think there are many people who have felt that their social condition was a basis for discrimination in their accommodation.

Aboriginal origin is explicitly protected only in Nova Scotia. Again, an opportunity for us to move from implicit protection to explicit protection because, in the main, very few people who feel that discrimination as an aboriginal person will take it to the human rights tribunal, which is unfortunate. The Sheldon M. Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership pointed out in its 2007 report that it's the indigenous people that desperately need to have this become a more explicit part of our Human Rights Act.

Political belief is another, that has been protected in British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, and Northwest Territories, with some variants to this found in Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. But we haven't to date decided within this province to explicitly protect people from discrimination on the basis of political belief.

Finally, language is explicitly protected only in Quebec. Again, the question, I guess, for us is to think about why we wouldn't want to be explicit about some of these basic rights that people have, that should not be in any way discriminated against.

While I fully support this bill and the intent – and it will make progress, I think, in finding that balance in terms of young families, including children's accommodation – I hope that the government will take it under advisement with the next review and we will indeed look at some of these other characteristics that are eminently suitable to protect under the Human Rights Act.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak at third reading to Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. In January 2017 the government of Alberta agreed to expand the Alberta Human Rights Act to include age as protected grounds under sections 4 and 5. Before this the Alberta Human Rights Act only protected age against discrimination in section 3, publications and notices; sections 7 and 8, employment practices and advertisements; and section 9, membership in a trade union, employers' organization, or occupational association.

Madam Speaker, this bill, Bill 23, will add age as a prohibited ground of discrimination under the areas of tenancy, goods, services, accommodations, or facilities. This government supports all Albertans, which is why we are proposing to strengthen our current human rights legislation and further protect Albertans from age discrimination.

Madam Speaker, my office, like many others here, received plenty of feedback regarding this issue. In one condo residence in Calgary-Northern Hills there is a condominium unit that has 252 suites. It was built in 2002. The building was designed for an older, mature population to age in place, with wheelchair-accommodating bathrooms, doorways, and open floor plans. The residence also has many amenities, including a pool with ramp access, a fitness room, a movie theatre, and daily social activities to encourage residents to remain active, both physically and mentally, due to the age of the

residents in this community. Ninety per cent or more of the population is 55 or older, with most being 70 and older.

5:00

The owners and tenants in this building have purposely purchased or rented units in this community because of the age restriction. I've been told repeatedly that children are welcome as visitors, but the residents are happy to live without the constant noise of young people. Their common areas include coffee shop areas, libraries, and games areas with pool tables and shuffleboard, and they strongly believe that these spaces would suffer with children living there permanently.

The condominium unit also relies on volunteers for their condo boards and to maintain their beautiful flower beds and gardens.

Finally, during one of my consultations I was told that living in a community like theirs saves the government from having to provide assisted living and long-term care facilities to these older residents. It is generally recognized that people live better and longer when they live in their own homes with the support of their neighbours and friends.

Madam Speaker, it is because of feedback like this and the consultations the government conducted last summer that many Albertans are in favour of allowing seniors-only housing to continue. The bill sets the minimum age for seniors-only housing at 55 or any age older than that. Seniors-only housing would also be required to accommodate, within their age restriction, special circumstances that are specified in regulation such as live-in caregivers.

Madam Speaker, we also know that many Albertans have made significant investments on the basis of condo bylaws in place at the time of purchase. This is why we have grandparented existing age restrictions for a 15-year transition period so that they will not violate section 4 of the act. Also, during this 15-year period age-restricted condominiums can transition to being seniors-only.

If passed, these amendments will come into force January 1, 2018. Madam Speaker, after hearing and reading all of the feedback I have received from residents in Calgary-Northern Hills, I believe this bill will strike an adequate compromise for all Albertans. This bill provides an opportunity to embrace diversity in Alberta and to align our legislation with other jurisdictions in Canada.

I will be supporting this bill in third reading, and I encourage all of the others in the room here to do the same. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none for 29(2)(a), are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to get to be part of this change in the Alberta Human Rights Act, to have been part of some similar changes that were made earlier to include gender orientation and transgender identity in the act as well. It's always good to see this kind of progress happen and see society move forward, and it's an honour to be a legislator that gets to be part of it.

I thank all of the members for their comments, I thank the minister for her work in putting this bill together, and I encourage everyone to vote in support. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

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

Bill 24

An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances

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

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Chair. It is my pleasure to finally be up to speak on the record in support of Bill 24. Throughout this debate it's hard not to be moved by the many personal stories shared by my MLA colleagues. I have to say that I am proud to be an MLA and ally. I am proud to support my colleagues on this particular issue and proud to support this bill without reservation. This bill provides clarification to school boards about how GSAs work in schools.

One of the things I found very interesting about the debate is that in my office I've been getting some letters, and I think it's interesting to sort of go through what one of those letters looks like and just sort of talk about those concerns and how, for this particular bill, perhaps those concerns are unfounded.

I'm going to quote a little bit from one of the letters I got recently from a constituent. It starts off by saying:

My criticism relates to the lack of nuance in the bill. There may be situations where parents ought to be notified about their children's involvements at school as these matters are serious: high rates of self-harm in trans kids, suicide risks, et cetera.

I will note that this particular point in the letter was actually addressed by the Health minister, in fact, in QP today, when she stated that all teachers, if they feel that there's a child that is about to put themselves in danger, will take the appropriate steps to make sure that that doesn't happen, which may of course include informing that particular child's parents.

The letter goes on to say:

Some kids are just not mature enough to work through their issues without the help of their parents, especially if they have other issues such as autism, et cetera.

Then it goes on to say:

I don't believe professionals can be trusted to have our children's best interests at heart.

Of course, I disagree with that. I believe that teachers who work in our school system are well trained and, you know, are able to work to the best of their ability to support students in whatever needs they may have. Also, I think that if there's a child that believes that they need to go to a GSA to talk about what they're feeling, then I believe that students are indeed mature enough to do that. But they are still kids in school, and that is why the GSAs exist, to allow them to talk that through with their peers or perhaps with the support of a teacher. So I disagree with that point.

The letter goes on to say:

Tragically, some parents can be hurtful to their LGBTQ kids, but it is a serious error in logic to say that most parents are hurtful.

I agree with this. It is, in fact, unfortunate that, you know, there are some parents that might for whatever reason perhaps not be as open or accepting if their kids came out to them as LGBTQ-plus. I always have faith that parents, upon learning this, would eventually come to learn to accept their children, but that might not be the initial response.

The same letter goes on to say:

This bill makes that problematic assumption.

That, like I said, parents could be hurtful to an LGBTQ kid.

It also assumes that the “system” is more equipped to support kids than their parents, which has historically been a disastrous assumption.

Now, I disagree with some of the assertions in there. We’ve heard from many people in this House and from the GSA rally that I attended at McDougall Centre this weekend about how disastrous it is when children and LGBTQ individuals are outed before they are ready. At the end of the day, that is what this bill is preventing.

5:10

Yeah, in some ways the system is actually able and equipped to be able to deal with this because, just like any other club in school, it provides a place for LGBTQ or otherwise supportive individuals to talk with their peer groups. At the end of the day, this is essentially just like another club, any other club in school. You know, if I had a child and he or she joined a club at school, say a chess club, for example, I’m pretty sure that schools don’t send a note home that your child has joined the chess club.

With that, the letter goes on, of course, to talk more about that assumption that, like I said, schools aren’t able to deal with it. I think they are.

This legislation, you know, makes sure that students are the ones who decide when and how they will have this deeply personal, important conversation with their parents and their loved ones and friends around them. This legislation does not force students to keep secrets from their parents. Students who are comfortable talking to their parents about their sexuality will do so. This bill does not prevent that. This bill saves lives by providing students with a safe place where they can support one another and find camaraderie and friendship. This legislation strengthens supports for students who wish to form or join a GSA and protects students who need these spaces.

Others have seemed to have been on the record that, you know, they believe that parents have a right to know what’s going on with their kids at school unless the parents are abusive. I feel like that may be a position to take. However, it puts teachers and school administrators in the very awkward position of having to determine if that is the case. I think that this bill provides the right balance of being able to protect our LGBTQ youth while, of course, not preventing those children from having that important conversation with their parents. At the end of the day, this bill is about the kids. It’s about the importance of protecting students who are questioning, who want to be supportive of their friends or talk to their peers about their various experiences.

I hope that we can get this bill passed because of what I heard at the GSA rally that I attended on the weekend. There was an individual who got up and spoke about her experiences in Catholic school, about the troubles in trying to form a GSA and what happens when individuals who were in a position of administration were not being as helpful as perhaps they otherwise could be. She said: I am not a court case. When there is a student who is in school and is questioning and is ready to come out, they should be able to do so, and this bill protects that.

I’d like to finish off by saying that I’m in a very privileged position in that I identify and am a straight white male, and that puts me in a position of privilege. But I’ve heard so much from those in the LGBTQ community when I was growing up, from those who are now adults in their 50s or 60s who had to hide their sexuality when perhaps we were at a much different place of acceptance, and I know from them that this bill is right. I know in my heart that it is right, and I am so happy to be on the record to unequivocally support Bill 24.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is a real honour to be able to rise today and speak in support of Bill 24. You know, a great number of members have already risen in this House and talked about the impact and the benefit of this bill and of ensuring that all students across Alberta, no matter where they go to school, no matter which city or town or village they live in, have a safe, welcoming, and caring place to learn. Ultimately, we want to make sure that all students across the province have that same right and that same ability, and I think that this act does a really great job of making sure that that consistency is there across the province.

Early in my tenure in this role I met a young woman, a young lesbian, actually. She came out to me at the end of a forum. I and a couple of other hon. members from across the way were at a youth forum that was held here. At the time the students had an opportunity to ask us all questions, and we had an opportunity to talk a little bit about what was important to us and our parties and what we believed in. One of the questions that we got asked, like, four times, I think, by four separate students was around the right to access the bathroom that a child identified with, that matched their gender identity. Members opposite dithered a little bit on it, but I was pretty clear with the students that human rights apply no matter where you are, no matter who you are, and that that was something that was really important to us and to our government.

This young woman came up to me after the forum, and she came out to me. She said thank you for the fact that we were so clearly in support of young queer youth. She talked about some of the fears and concerns that she had as a young queer woman and about some of the experiences that she had had at school. We chatted a little bit about the club that she was part of at school and how helpful it had been to her. You know, I think of her story a lot. I think of our conversation a lot. I think that every student across our fine province, wherever they live, should have that same access to a loving, supporting, and caring group who identify with them.

I wanted to also take a moment to speak to the mental health side of this legislation and to the mental health and other impacts of this healthwise. Last month, in October, a survey came out. It was called Being Safe, Being Me in Alberta: Results of the Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey. Now, it was a comprehensive survey of transgender and gender-diverse youth from across Canada that included a selection of youth from Alberta specifically. It included a lot of information and results that, in my opinion, really point to the importance and value of this legislation. It also underscored a lot of the things that, you know, we hear a lot from LGBTQ-plus youth and some of the issues that they face.

I just wanted to highlight a couple of points. To me, the one that stood out the most was that of the youth surveyed, 91 per cent of Albertan trans youth don’t seek help for their mental health because they’re scared that their parents will find out – 91 per cent – and that is under a situation where counsellors, therapists, and mental health professionals are obligated to protect their privacy. Can you imagine how few would come forward to seek help for their mental health concerns if they thought that they ran the risk of their teacher calling their parents to tell them that they joined a GSA?

Additionally, nearly three-quarters of the youth surveyed reported self-harm, and about two-thirds reported serious thoughts of suicide. More startling, more stark is that more than 2 in 5 had attempted to end their lives – 2 in 5 – and only 1 in 3 said that they had an adult in their family whom they could talk to about their problems.

Madam Chair, I think that, really, when you look at those numbers, we see that there's a real need for that peer-to-peer support for young LGBTQ-plus youth to have someone whom they can talk to who's been on the same path that they've been on, who's maybe further on in the journey or maybe in a similar place and still really exploring their identity and questioning who they are. Having someone that they can talk to about their fears and their worries is critically important for their well-being.

5:20

Another thing that was noted in this study was that high levels of parental support and family connectedness correlated to better health outcomes, not just mental health outcomes but also physical health outcomes. I would also say that, you know, in the absence of family support, peer support is incredibly valuable. It's one of those things that throughout the mental health field we are seeing more and more, that having the opportunity to talk to someone who has had a similar experience to you and who can talk about their own personal and lived experience is incredibly valuable for people to be able to see the way through any concerns or worries that they're having, and it's something that's being recognized throughout the mental health care system.

The Canadian Mental Health Association has recently graduated their first group of peer-to-peer volunteers in the Calgary branch, and those folks are out now working with people in all fields, supporting through similar experiences, whether it's someone who has a family member who is living with a mental health concern or whether it's someone who's struggling with substance use or maybe someone who's struggling with issues around homelessness. Having that support available in the school, where children are, is just so critical.

Ultimately, you know, we've seen that GSAs have been existing in a number of schools for some time, but this allows those to be at every school and ensures that that equality is there for students across the province. I really can't speak more highly in favour of this.

I would also note, just kind of in closing, one of the recommendations that was in this report, this report that has some concerning information about the mental health of transgender children. It was the recommendation to improve the safety and the welcoming nature of schools, whether that be through changes to the curriculum or through the establishment of support for GSAs and QSAs.

Madam Chair, I have to say that I am just so proud to be part of a government that not only takes this issue seriously but is working to address it and make sure that those supports are there for vulnerable youth when and where they need them. I'm really proud to be able to vote in support of this bill, and I would urge all members of the Chamber to do likewise.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 24?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 24.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those agreed, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

[The voice vote indicated that the report was concurred in]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:24 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For:

Anderson, S.	Jabour	Phillips
Carlier	Jansen	Piquette
Carson	Kazim	Rosendahl
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Coolahan	Larivee	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Eggen	Miller	Swann
Gray	Miranda	Turner
Hoffman	Nielsen	Westhead
Horne	Payne	Woollard

5:40

Against:

Ellis	Nixon	Smith
Hanson	Pitt	Strankman
Hunter	Schneider	Yao
MacIntyre		

Totals: For – 39 Against – 10

[The report was concurred in]

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

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've had a great debate this afternoon, and I'd like to move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn the House until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:42 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Introduction of Guests	1891
Ministerial Statements	
Bullying Awareness Week	1892
Oral Question Period	
Keystone XL Pipeline Project	1893
Federal Tax and Energy Policies	1893
Provincial Response to Opioid Trafficking and Use.....	1894
Auditor General Report on Health Care	1894
Consumer Protection	1895
Resources for LGBTQ2S Students and Their Parents	1896
Access to Information.....	1896
Coal Community Transition Funding	1897
Methane Emission Reduction	1897
Postsecondary Institution Infrastructure Projects	1898
Supportive Living Facility Food Preparation	1898
Gravel Mining in Rocky View County.....	1899
Agricultural Operation Practice Review Committee	1899
Farm and Ranch Worker Regulation Consultation	1900
Members' Statements	
Métis Week.....	1901
Government Policies	1901
World Diabetes Day	1901
Access to Information.....	1902
Workers' Compensation Review	1902
Red Tape	1902
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 29 An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving.....	1903
Bill 209 Radon Awareness and Testing Act.....	1903
Tabling Returns and Reports	1903
Tablings to the Clerk	1903
Orders of the Day	1904
Government Motions	
Morning Sitting Cancellation	1904
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 27 Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017.....	1904
Third Reading	
Bill 23 Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017.....	1910
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 24 An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances	1917
Division	1919

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