



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, April 4, 2016

Day 8

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)	Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)	MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)	Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)	Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND), Government House Leader
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND), Deputy Government House Leader	McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC), Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND), Deputy Government House Leader	McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)	McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)	McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)	Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)	Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)	Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W), Official Opposition House Leader	Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W), Official Opposition Whip
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND), Government Whip	Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND), Premier
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W), Official Opposition Deputy Whip	Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)	Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)	Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (ND)	Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip	Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)	Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)	Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND)	Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)	Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)	Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)	Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)	Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)	Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)	Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)	Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader	Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)	Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)	Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)	Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)	Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)	Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W), Leader of the Official Opposition	Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
Kleinstauber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND), Deputy Government Whip
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	Vacant, Calgary-Greenway

Party standings:

New Democrat: 54 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Vacant: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Clerk	Philip Massolin, Manager of Research Services	Chris Caughell, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel/Director of House Services	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Gordon H. Munk, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and Legal Research Officer	Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms	Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
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Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
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Anderson, S.	Hunter
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Connolly	Panda
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Clark	Nixon
Connolly	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Starke
Cyr	Sucha
Drever	Swann
Jansen	van Dijken
Loyola	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Kazim	

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Hanson	van Dijken
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Drysdale	Rosendahl
Hanson	Woollard
Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 4, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us reflect. Let each of us, in our own way, reflect on the great strength and courage of Albertans all across this province. During times like this we need to have confidence that strength can be found from within and from those around us. Let us welcome the small acts of kindness and recognize that like threads when tied together, they become a strong rope that prepares us for the future.

Let's now welcome the singing of *O Canada*.

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.

Statement by the Speaker

Robert H. Reynolds, QC
Seventh Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

The Speaker: Hon. members, with the indulgence of the House I would like to make an announcement. It gives me great pleasure to announce the appointment of Robert H. Reynolds, QC, as the seventh Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. [Standing ovation] Hon. members, I think you may be standing more than once in this case here today.

As the seventh Clerk of the Legislature of Alberta, effective today, Mr. Reynolds, a long-serving and dedicated employee of the Alberta Legislative Assembly, is one of Canada's foremost experts on Westminster-style parliamentary practice. Rob's professionalism and commitment to the public service will ensure continued focus on the Legislative Assembly Office's mission to provide nonpartisan parliamentary support and to implement the innovative changes necessary to sustain the Legislative Assembly Office as a leader in parliamentary support organizations in Canada.

I would like to personally express my thanks to the representatives of the various caucuses who were consulted and participated in the process for their time and advice with respect to Rob's selection. I can truly say that Mr. Reynolds' selection was supported across all parties in this Legislature. I am confident that Mr. Reynolds will provide strong leadership to the dedicated LAO staff and employees and valued service and advice and decisive direction to this Assembly and to myself. I can tell you that personally I look forward to working with Mr. Reynolds.

I would now invite the Deputy Speaker to make some brief comments and to introduce Mr. Reynolds' family.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I first met Rob Reynolds about 10 years ago, when I began working here at the Legislature. I remember being in a committee room, and it was like this deep sigh of relief as soon as Rob came in the room because here was the

man with all the answers. I've come to know Rob very well over the last little while, and I'm so thrilled that he's taking on the role of Clerk because he is still the man with all the answers. Even if he doesn't have the answer to the question, he always has something really funny to say.

It is indeed my pleasure and my honour, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Ritu Khullar, who is the wife of our new Clerk, and their younger son, Nikhil. They're both seated in your gallery. Their older son, Samir, is also joining us but not physically. He's watching the session streamed at the University of Waterloo, where he is in attendance. I see they have risen. Would you please give them all the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. As we all know in this Assembly, family is the reason that we are able to do what we do.

Again with the indulgence of the House I would recognize the Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations, Mr. Reynolds. It's my pleasure to rise today and give a warm welcome to the seventh Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Robert Reynolds. Now, they've written some stuff here for me, which I will read.

Mr. Reynolds brings to his new role a wealth of experience, having worked closely with the officers of the Legislature for 20 years. He has a long history in Edmonton, having articulated and practised in the city before joining the Legislative Assembly Office in 1993 as Parliamentary Counsel. He became Senior Parliamentary Counsel in '97 and moved on to the position of Law Clerk and director of interparliamentary relations in 2010. He is a frequent speaker on the subject of parliamentary privilege and is often why my privilege motions fail, I believe. He's recognized as one of Canada's foremost experts on parliamentary practice. He has also twice served as president of the Association of Parliamentary Counsel in Canada.

I just want to say that he's always been most helpful to us in opposition and again in government, has a tremendous sense of humour and an engaging laugh, which I'm sure that all of us will come to appreciate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome, Mr. Reynolds.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an absolute pleasure – and thank you for the opportunity – to rise and just say a few words on behalf of my caucus on the appointment of Mr. Reynolds as the new Clerk of the Assembly. With over 20 years of service to this Assembly we know that Mr. Reynolds, Rob, is a model of professionalism and integrity, serving the Assembly with the unique ability to lighten any situation with that wonderful smile and his great sense of humour. We hope that this service will continue for years and years to come; however, whether he intends to beat Dr. McNeil's 28 years' tenure as Clerk is perhaps optimistic thinking.

I might just add a very quick thank you to you, Mr. Speaker, for ensuring a multicaucus approach to the appointment, one that the Wildrose fully supports.

1:40

It can't be escaped that Mr. Reynolds has a very particular sense of humour. Some would call it dry; others just don't get the joke. So in honour of that humour, a little bit of humour on qualities

found in that rare vintage of Queen's Counsel lawyers. Château Queen's Counsel is a rare, dry vintage, matured in remote corners of Edmonton and around the world. It has a prominent nose and a full, round body. It's rather crusty, with a price tag that makes it hard to stomach, and is best left stored undisturbed in dark cellars for many years.

Now that my own attempt at his sense of dry humour has either hit or missed, my absolute heartfelt congratulations on behalf of the Wildrose colleagues, Mr. Reynolds, on this new chapter of your life. I look forward to your orders du jour.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I must tell the House that I'm still working on understanding all of the new Clerk's humour. I have figured out about 50 per cent of them. I also must tell both of you gentlemen that I have some new ammunition here to use as you two bring resolutions to the floor.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, very much. Certainly, it gives me great pleasure and it's a great privilege today on behalf of not just the current members of the Progressive Conservative caucus but past members of the Progressive Conservative caucuses that have served with Mr. Reynolds and, indeed, members of legislative staff both here in Edmonton and around the province – you know, one of the things that I think is important to realize is that as the head now of the Legislative Assembly Office Mr. Reynolds is in fact the boss of all of our constituency assistants as well, and that's an important role that he will play. I know that Dr. McNeil's role in that was certainly appreciated, and I know that Mr. Reynolds will carry that on in a way and in a culture that were established and, I think, will be maintained and carried on through his tenure.

You know, I'm well aware of Mr. Reynolds' wry sense of humour, and despite the fact that he is an Anglican lawyer, I'm quite prepared to serve under his direction because Lutheran veterinarians just do that. It's certainly a pleasure to congratulate him on his appointment.

I, too, echo the comments that were made that the process to ensure an all-party development and selection, I think, is something that is appreciated by all, given the nonpartisan nature that is so critical in this role.

One final comment. I'm certainly glad to know that I, too, may have the privilege of learning what it means to have my points of privilege turned down as well.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to stand, too, and congratulate Mr. Rob Reynolds as the new Clerk of the Assembly. I would hope in the spirit of the times that we're going to save some money on this man as well as get the results that we need. He's been approachable, deferential, diligent, and certainly in over a decade of my working with Rob, it's been a pleasure to both work and challenge some of the decisions that have been made here. He will be very instrumental in the critical decisions that we make over the next few years, and I have every faith in Rob, that he will serve this Legislature and the people of Alberta in a very exemplary way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I also rise and on behalf of my entire caucus would like to echo the praise that

my colleagues have rightly shown to Mr. Rob Reynolds and also echo my thanks to you, Mr. Speaker, for the thorough process, the crosspartisan, nonpartisan process that you went through in naming Mr. Reynolds as Clerk. Now, that's something that we know, as we've heard, doesn't happen every day in this Assembly.

Mr. Reynolds and I have a little bit of history. I'm sure he doesn't remember me, but I certainly remember him when he started in this role, if I'm not mistaken, 22 years ago. I was working my very first job, for the Official Opposition here in the Assembly.

An Hon. Member: Which opposition was that?

Mr. Clark: It was an opposition led by Laurence Decore. I had a tremendous respect for, a tremendous affinity for him and everything he stood for.

It is something, that our paths cross again, and I just wanted to echo and again offer my heartfelt congratulations and look forward to your strong leadership of the Legislative Assembly Office, something that I know each of us respects, and I know how important that is for all of us and all the work that we do in the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

The first official action of our Clerk, to call for . . .

The Clerk: Introduction of Visitors.

The Speaker: It gets better.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and also my congratulations to the new Clerk.

My pleasure to rise and to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 31 students plus four of their student supervisors, including teachers, from St. Martha school in the Edmonton-McClung riding. The teachers include Ms Shelley LaFontaine, educational assistant Mrs. Elizabeth Persad, parent helpers Ms Tracy Reyes-Fiszler and Ms Anita Fuernsinn. I'll ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to introduce to you and through you the students and staff of the beautiful Bowden Grandview school. If you'd please stand when I call your name. We have with us today Ms Tracy Dreher, Ms Brenda Sherwood, Mrs. Carrie Chatt, Mrs. Amanda Minty, Mrs. Tracy Thorkman, Mr. Chad Hunter, Mrs. Sheryl Neilson, Miss Andrea Rainault, and approximately 32 students. If you'd all rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly the wonderful students of Meyokumin school. They are accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Megan Gregoire Davis and Ms MacLeod as well as a parent, Mr. Jas Lallh. I ask them to please rise now and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly a true Edmonton superhero and her team of cancer-fighting avengers. We are joined by seven-year-old Mable Tooke, whose heroic alter ego we are familiar with, Spider-Mable. Spider-Mable is a cancer survivor who is the Canadian Cancer Society's daffodil champion this year, helping raise awareness and hope in the fight against this terrible disease. I'd ask that both Spider-Mable as well as her parents, Lisa and Neil, and grandparents Rick and Yvonne rise and please remain standing as I introduce some of their other avenger partners here. They include Christine McCourt-Reid, national board member of the Canadian Cancer Society; Angeline Webb, policy and health promotion department manager with the Canadian Cancer Society for Alberta and the Northwest Territories; Cerina Lee, a graduate student at the University of Alberta School of Public Health and a public policy intern at the Canadian Cancer Society for Alberta and the Northwest Territories.

Spider-Mable, you are such an inspiration to all of us. Thanks for being here today. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: I think we have much to learn, all of us, from the strength of children.

I'm going to ask for unanimous permission of the House to finish Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today and introduce on your behalf two guests seated in your gallery, Dr. Terry Daniel and his 11-year-old grandson, Aiden Daniel. Dr. Daniel is a professor in the department of finance and management science in the School of Business at the University of Alberta. Aiden Daniel is 11 years old and has a keen interest in politics. I would now ask that Terry and Aiden rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:50

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and all members of the Assembly leaders and members of the Hope Bridges Society of Strathmore. I would ask that they please stand as I call their names: Cathy Lindon, Terry Gathercole, Patricia Timmermans, and John Ashton. Strathmore's Hope Bridges Society uses creative expression through the arts to foster meaningful relationships and change the perception of difference. Hope Bridges believes that everyone belongs and promotes inclusion and values citizenship in everything they do. In a spirit of hospitality and a standard of excellence, Hope Bridges facilitates the connection of community members through inclusive arts activities, where they are not judged and where all are uniquely valued. Hope Bridges works to build a stronger community using arts programming that promotes connection and well-being through participation and inclusion. Please join me in thanking and welcoming members of Hope Bridges Society to the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several members of the North Edmonton Minor Football

Association, NEMFA, the Edmonton Seahawks. NEMFA was created in 1993 to serve children aged eight to 17 years in north Edmonton and has grown from an organization first run out of the trunk of a car and a garage, with 17 players and only 13 uniforms, to today, with a board of nine, over 40 field staff, an average of 200 players registered annually, and their clubhouse in the glorious community of Edmonton-Castle Downs. Joining us today in the gallery are Marvin Mills, the president and sometimes coach; Ken Anderson, the vice-president; Mirella Horner, the general manager of football operations; her husband, Paul Horner, equipment coordinator and former coach; and Shelley Yuskow, secretary and former registrar. I'd ask them to remain standing and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce something new, the freshly minted member elect for Calgary-Greenway, Mr. Prab Gill. Though Prab is not sworn in yet, we look forward to him joining us down here, amongst the rest of us. With Prab today is Mr. Mandeep Shergill, who was Prab's campaign manager and who will be working with Prab in the Calgary-Greenway constituency office. I would ask them both now to please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Energy Policies

Mr. Jean: On Friday an additional 440 Albertans lost their jobs, this time at Cenovus. Wages are plummeting across the province, with Alberta seeing the largest year-over-year decline ever. And it's not just in the energy sector but in every industry right across the province almost. The NDP has responded with a failed jobs program, new taxes on everyone and everything, and damaging new regulations. To the Premier: what hope can suffering Albertans possibly have in a government that continues to do this type of damage to Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government is very concerned about the consequences of the significant job losses that we are seeing across the province, and that's why we are acting to do everything that we can to support Alberta communities, to support Alberta families, and also to diversify the economy, something that the folks over there don't think should be a priority, and also to engage in job-creation measures. There are a number of issues that we've talked about before, and I look forward to talking about more of them today and in the budget as we go forward.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the Premier recently applauded the federal budget, saying that she was pleased and that it was a good start. Seriously, we have the federal environment minister commenting on how the federal budget is about moving in the direction of no development in the oil sector. There's more red tape, there are more delays and more uncertainty surrounding the approval of new pipelines than ever before, and a tanker ban, of course, remains in place on the west coast, without any word whatsoever from the government. Ottawa is becoming even more distant and uncaring

about Alberta. When will the Premier actually stand in her place and stand up for Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, what we've said is that as we try to work with our colleagues across the country, we're going to engage in respectful dialogue and discussion. We're not going to engage in tweeting and name-calling and that kind of thing because that doesn't get us to where we need to go. Now, for instance, the member opposite began his questions talking about job losses. Our government went to the federal government and said: EI doesn't work for Albertans. As a result of the changes, which, yes, must be improved – and you've heard from me on that already several times – over \$300 million will come into Alberta, into the pockets of Alberta families who've lost their jobs, that wouldn't have been there based on the representations from those folks over there.

Mr. Jean: There is one issue Albertans want this Premier to fight for. The tanker ban on the Pacific north coast is bad news for Alberta's energy sector and all of Albertans. It blocks a pipeline that would get Albertans back to work and would grow our economy. I've asked the government nine times if they support the Liberal ban on tanker traffic. For an Alberta Premier this should be a very easy question, with only one right answer. Premier, do you oppose the B.C. north coast tanker ban? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Leader of the Opposition continues his campaign of intimidation and half-truth to get pipelines built. Here's a fact: there is no tanker ban in place yet on the west coast. So there's a thing you should probably know.

Secondly, what's delaying Gateway being built are the 209 conditions that the NEB put in place under the member opposite's government. That's what's delaying that pipeline getting built. We know, going forward, that shaming and yelling at our provincial and federal counterparts is not the way to get things done. We will work collaboratively. We will have discussions at all levels till we get what . . .

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

Mr. Jean: Albertans are also worried about the looming increase of their power bills, and the NDP have no one but themselves to blame. Power purchase agreements have a clause to stop governments from making generation of electricity unprofitable. Instead of studying the economic impact, the NDP raised taxes through the specified gas emitters regulation starting January 1 of this year. Can the Premier tell Albertans if her government did any economic analysis whatsoever about possible consequences before plowing ahead with these ideological changes?

Ms Notley: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we've done a great deal of economic analysis. We know that we need to walk away from the archaic policies and practices of both parties over there in order to build our economy going forward and to improve our environmental record to get the very pipelines that those folks think are so important built, the same ones that haven't been built over the previous 10 years of ignoring the environment and ignoring people across this country. We won't do that. We will act responsibly on our climate change leadership plan, and that will contribute to getting those pipelines built, and it will also protect the environment.

Mr. Jean: The Balancing Pool, an independent body created to protect the electricity grid from political interference, has confirmed the rights of power companies to cancel their PPAs. The Premier apparently didn't get the memo. She's now preparing to use taxpayers' resources to challenge the Balancing Pool and these companies. It's a giant mess, and Albertans will be left to cover the cost of up to \$1 billion per year because of NDP incompetence. Why can't the Premier admit her government made a mistake and that all power consumers in Alberta will now be paying the price?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the issue here is what the power companies believe the previous government agreed to. It is true that it is outrageously shameful what they think, because they believe that they got to sign contracts that send the profit always in their direction and the losses always in the direction of the consumers. That is shameful.

2:00

Mr. Jean: We know that this is just the beginning of the NDP experiments with power bills. This government is paying a consultant \$100,000 a month to figure out how to shut down coal plants. There is no clear plan on how to replace the electricity except through either massive taxpayer subsidies or much higher power bills for Alberta families. My question is simple. How can Albertans trust that the NDP has their best interests at heart when everything this government has done has only made things much worse?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition says that he is 90 per cent agreed on everything with the leader of the third party, so my question is: are they 90 per cent agreed on a contract that power companies believe means that they keep all the profits and the public picks up all the losses? Do they agree with that? That is the question that I think should be answered.

The Speaker: The Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Municipal Grants in Place of Taxes

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, municipalities rely on provincial grants in lieu of taxes to pay for the municipal services that provincially owned facilities use. The previous government's budget included cutting the grants in lieu program on social and senior housing facilities. Since despite municipal concerns this government kept that cut in place, to the minister of seniors: how does she justify the province dodging responsibility and sticking taxpayers with the bill by transferring the cost for provincial social housing to municipalities?

The Speaker: The minister of seniors.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the member for the question. He's quite right; it was the previous government who made the decision to cut this funding. We haven't been able to restore every cut that the previous government has made, but we do know that now is the time to invest in infrastructure like roads and bridges, and that's what we're doing, and that is a significant support to municipalities. We're working with them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, that didn't precisely answer the question. Last month the AUMA mayors' caucus met with the housing minister. The minister refused to reinstate this grant program. This

hits municipalities hard; for example, Calgary, a \$5 million loss; Lethbridge, a \$913,000 loss. Now some municipalities are considering a moratorium on approving any further social and senior housing in their communities. Will the minister admit that they made a mistake and announce today the return of the grants in lieu of taxes program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The unprecedented collapse in the oil price means that we need to make fiscally responsible decisions. Unfortunately, we're not in a position to approve every request for funding. Our government is proud of our relationship with municipalities and the investments we're making in these communities, and we're working well with our partners.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government has seen no issue with drastically raising taxes on Albertans. Increased business tax, increased income tax, and the NDP PST carbon tax have all resulted in Albertans handing over more and more of their hard-earned money to this government. Provincial facilities have cost impacts on municipalities, yet this government refuses to pay when it's their turn. To the Premier: does the Premier think that it is fair that this government refuses to pay its fair share?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, to begin with, let me just be very clear that Alberta continues to have the lowest taxes of any province in the country. Secondly, that will remain the case because we know that now is not the time for more to come out. It's very interesting watching the folks over there because, you know, one day is a spending day, the next day is a cutting day, the next day is a billion-dollar cut day, and the next day is a billion-dollar spend day. You know, we just cannot possibly keep track of whether you want us to spend or cut, spend or cut. The minister made a very good point. We need to be responsible. We need to manage our finances prudently. We can't say yes to everything, and we're going to move forward on that basis.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The leader of the third party.

Government Spending

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the PC caucus launched Engage, a public conversation that asked Albertans what is important and how government should deliver its part of the picture. Time and again we've heard this government say that they can't cut spending without cutting front-line services. The PC caucus completely rejects this premise. Alberta's talented and knowledgeable public service, if empowered, will find a better way. Premier, will you empower the taxpayers' employees who are experts in Alberta public service to identify cost savings and then implement these savings quickly?

Ms Notley: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, that would be better than announcing a billion-dollar cut to health care without the slightest idea of how you were going to do it, which is exactly what the members opposite did, which, of course, is exactly why they didn't win the last election. Albertans didn't want a billion-dollar cut to health care, nor do they want a \$4 billion health care cut, which is what they're talking about today.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, let me correct the Premier, who I don't believe was sincere with what she just said. In 2013-14 at a cost of

\$3.2 billion Alberta had 2.1 million emergency room visits, of which, according to AHS, only 10 per cent were real emergencies. Ninety per cent of that amount is \$2.8 billion annually. So we're not looking for cuts. Will the government do something to redirect this overexpenditure in one area and find a way to deliver those services in a more appropriate and cost-effective way, as we do suggest?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, making sure that we're using the resources that we do have efficiently and effectively is an ongoing priority for this government. That's why we keep investments in numbers like 8-1-1, where you can call anywhere in Alberta and have an opportunity to speak directly to a registered nurse, talk through your symptoms, and find out whether or not you do need to go to emergency. We're not going to shut down emergency rooms and fire nurses and lay off tons of public service workers. It's important that we move forward in a sustainable responsible way and find efficiencies and invest in primary care.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the only ones talking about laying off doctors and nurses are on that side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, the government's spending is out of control, and they are borrowing for operational expenses for the first time in decades. Finding savings today will avoid deep cuts later. That's how it works. To the Minister of Health. You know and we know that abuse of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs places huge burdens on health, justice, and social services. What will your government actually do to prevent harm before it costs a fortune and further harms Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the first things this government did was extend the ban on flavoured tobacco products to include the exemption that the members opposite approved, which was menthol. We have consistent practices, and they're showing that the numbers are going down and that youth are less susceptible to smoking. As well, we're continuing to move forward in a sustainable and reasonable way as opposed to magically pulling \$4 billion of cuts out of thin air. If it was such low-hanging fruit, why didn't the members opposite address it when they were in government?

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mental Health Services for Postsecondary Students

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mental health is an important topic and one that I'm pleased to see this government seems to be taking seriously. Now, there's very clear evidence to show that most mental health issues have first onset by age 24, and untreated mental illness has significant implications for academic success, productivity, substance use, and social relationships. Addressing mental health in Alberta's postsecondary system absolutely must be a priority. To the Minister of Advanced Education. This year marks the end of the three-year plan that allocated \$12.5 million to postsecondary mental health. In your opinion has this been an effective program?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, we've heard loud and

clear from students all across the province of the value provided by the programs that were initiated under the previous round of funding that was allocated to those programs, and certainly I'm working with my colleague the Minister of Health to look at options for continuing to support mental health services on campuses all across this province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad we seem to agree that it's a worthwhile program, but I think that, very clearly, it's one that is in need of improvement. Now, the current program treats students in Alberta's schedule 1 universities differently than the rest. Per capita funding was in some cases 30 times higher. Students at NAIT received \$4 per full-time learner equivalent in mental health funding whereas the University of Lethbridge received \$146 per FLE. To the same minister: do you agree that this inequity is absurd and should have been addressed sooner?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for pointing out the fact that the previous round of funding wasn't in fact given on a per capita basis. One of the things that we need to address is that access to mental health services is not equitable across the province. A student at NAIT, for example, lives in a large city that has more access to mental health services in the surrounding community than perhaps a student in Lethbridge or Grande Prairie would have access to. Providing equitable mental health funding is a priority for this government going forward.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

2:10

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that the minister and I are on the same page on this one. I wish, though, that you'd addressed the issue sooner. You still have an opportunity, though.

The students in Alberta's 26 postsecondary institutions, I'm sure we agree, are key to our continued prosperity as well as economic diversification in Alberta, but they need the tools to succeed, and that especially includes support for their mental well-being, which is enabled through stable, predictable, and equitable funding that does not discriminate against students based on what school they choose to attend. To the Minister of Advanced Education again: will you commit to providing stable, equitable, long-term funding . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the acknowledgement that the hon. member and I are on the same page, which is odd because he's usually on the same page as the Wildrose and the PCs.

At any rate, we are looking forward to making sure that predictable, sustainable funding is in place for all of our postsecondary institutions across the province, and that will include mental health supports for our students.

Petrochemical Diversification Program

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, the low price of oil is stressing families in my constituency of Edmonton-Manning. They tell me that they are worried about making ends meet and that they are looking at our government to take action. To the Minister of Energy: what steps

are you taking to diversify our petrochemical industry and help get Alberta off the resource royalty roller coaster?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Well, first of all, we believe that creating jobs for Alberta families is our number one priority. A few weeks ago the minister of economic development and I announced a petrochemical diversification program that is a competitive program that will leverage \$500 million of royalty credits into \$5 billion of investment.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, given that many Albertan families are feeling the effects of this downturn and are still looking for work, to the same minister: how many jobs do you expect these investments to create?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. We estimate that this program alone will create two to three projects around Alberta, create 3,000 jobs in the construction phase and 1,000 permanent jobs after production begins.

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, given that I've heard from many constituents who have been struggling for some months now and are anxious about their future, again to the Energy minister: how soon can we expect Albertans to get back to work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. We estimate that after this competitive program is done and the projects are awarded, work will begin by the end of this year in the construction; again, 3,000 jobs in construction, 1,000 permanent. And we, unlike what our opposition has said, are not picking winners and losers. These are 3,000 winner jobs and 1,000 winner jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation and WCB Review

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent internal government documents shed light on the implementation of Bill 6. The documents show that department officials warned the minister that Bill 6 would create – and I quote – panic. Now the government is preparing round-table discussions, and farmers need certainty, not panic. Can the minister commit to Albertans that actual farmers and ranchers, not just producer and labour groups, will be participating in these talks?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the member for the question. I can assure this House and the Alberta public that actual farmers and ranchers are going to be at these technical working groups as will workers. It's important to remember that the legislation is about farm workers, and workers will be involved as will the whole industry across Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Strankman: Again, Mr. Speaker, the same internal documents recommended that there be a call centre established and manned by

experts to field the numerous questions that Bill 6 left unanswered. Given that the members opposite refused to answer their phones or make themselves available until thousands of farmers from every corner of the province started protesting, why did the minister ignore his experts' advice in this regard?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. I couldn't disagree with the member opposite more. I have been absolutely making myself available – I think he's probably aware of that – as have many people here on the front bench and behind me, who have made themselves available and continue to make themselves available. I'm absolutely looking forward to the next steps in this process.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government ignored advice on Bill 6's timing and consultation. Since the government is now launching a major review into the WCB, a broken monopoly that they're forcing upon rural Albertans, how can these same rural Albertans trust this minister to choose common sense over ideology on any recommended changes to WCB?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely critical that Albertans feel confident that the Workers' Compensation Board is providing fair compensation and meaningful rehabilitation. The review of the Workers' Compensation Board is long overdue. It hasn't been reviewed in 15 years, so we are taking a look at it. We will be engaging farmers, ranchers, and workers in all segments of the sectors that are covered by WCB to make sure that they are engaged in this conversation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Government Spending (continued)

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently hosted a prebudget round-table in Calgary-Lougheed, and the recommendations of my constituents mirror our PC caucus's \$4 billion challenge as outlined in our Engage document, which we are proud to launch today and which I will be tabling in the House this afternoon. So I'll ask the Finance minister: regarding the widespread economic concern, which has already negatively affected Alberta's historically stellar credit rating, will your government take the challenge of our constituents and our caucus to control spending through cost savings and efficiencies while ensuring quality front-line services?

Mr. Ceci: I appreciate the question, Mr. Speaker. Quality front-line services is a task we take very seriously in terms of funding appropriately, and we're doing that. We did that with Budget 2015. We'll continue to do that with Budget 2016.

I appreciate the engagement with your constituents. Many MLAs from this side have done the same thing and passed on the information. As well, thousands of Albertans have taken the opportunity to get in touch with us online and give us their feedback.

Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Minister.

Given that some accuse your government of having the same fervour for deficit and debt as the federal cousins and given that the constituents of Calgary-Lougheed don't share any ideologically different direction but do share the PC caucus's respect for fiscal restraint, again to the Finance minister: when might we expect a response from the government to the letter that I sent on behalf of our constituents, and beyond that, what assurance can you provide to all Albertans that your government will not slide into a damaging, unsustainable fiscal cycle of perpetual operating deficits?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm just thinking back to Budget 2015, where we presented that. One of the people who gave us a quote with regard to our borrowing for operating, the point you're bringing up – it's not unusual. Let me start with that. In fact, it's very usual at the point when the economy changes dramatically and revenues fall off. Indeed, the whole structure of budgets, whether they are provincial or federal, contains a certain automatic stabilization. David Dodge, former governor of the Bank of Canada, believes we're on the right track. We're going to be on the right track with Budget 2016 as well.

Mr. Rodney: And the Finance minister knows very well that there were other recommendations. I'm not sure how closely those are being followed.

Given that the constituents of Calgary-Lougheed have participated in this prebudget consultation, as have, as you have mentioned, thousands of other Albertans, and given that our constituents' advice to you is to control spending and debt levels and given that they are also urging your government to focus on job creation, which is another key focus of our PC caucus Engage document, to the Finance minister: how much of the advice from the constituents of Calgary-Lougheed and our caucus is reflected in the overall message that you've received from other Albertans? By the way, when did you send the budget . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: You know, the budget will be coming out and will be tabled on April 14. As soon as we have it ready, you'll get it.

In our prebudget tour we went around the province. Many cities and towns have been engaged: the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie. We held two telephone town halls, where over 66,000 Albertans listened for a period of time. We have heard many, many things. Some of those are reflected in your consultation, and we will be presenting all of those on April 14.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Airdrie.

2:20

PDD Service Delivery

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP have established a track record of implementing policy without consultation. We saw it with Bill 6, and now the government has taken aim at our most vulnerable by implementing a hasty transformational plan. A three-year consultation process was reduced to a rushed implementation period for all the hard-working PDD care providers in this province to complete the new and mandatory master service agreement. Why won't the minister acknowledge the need for a thoughtful and deliberate process for PDD care providers?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will begin by saying that our government has stabilized services for the most vulnerable people in Alberta. Regarding PDD, it was our government who started consultation on safety standards, and that's the way we will move forward. Going forward in all our policies, we will consult the sector and do what's the right thing to do in consultation with the sector.

Thank you.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP government's transformational plan includes a new provision where all service providers must now sign a master agreement and given that this agreement includes a gag clause preventing public commentary should care providers have comments or concerns about their industry, how can the minister say that Alberta's most vulnerable are being adequately protected when those directly involved in PDD care cannot be whistle-blowers?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned before, for any step, any policy going forward, we will consult PDD, and we will do what's recommended by the sector. That's the approach we have taken with safety standards, and that's the approach we will take going forward.

Thank you.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that these rushed timelines will harm and are harming service delivery for those with developmental disabilities and given the fact that the government's moves to date are removing local decision-making, showing that they have no faith in the great work that the providers do in our communities, how can this minister not see that his transformation of the PDD funding structure is rushed, ill consulted, and lacking the confidence of PDD leaders?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will reiterate one more time that these issues are important to our government. We intend to work with PDD service providers on these issues, and we will get this right.

I want to mention that I'm glad to hear that from that side of the House because these are stale issues for them, that they have no interest in legislating.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Municipal Funding

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week I received a very concerning letter from the village of Vilna. It was in regard to this government's decision not to reinstate the grant in lieu of taxes for 25,000 housing units across the province, over \$11,000 to this small village alone. Downloading the cost of these units onto municipalities is wrong, especially since the primary owner of the units is the government of Alberta. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: why does this government want everyday Albertans to pay extra to cover the government's share?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is very proud of our relationship with municipalities. This decision was made by the previous government, and at this difficult time economically we can't reinstate every cut that the previous government made. We're working with municipalities and supporting them through investment in infrastructure.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are tired of this government raising their taxes. Given that without this funding municipalities will have to raise taxes on property owners, who are already struggling to make ends meet, many of them seniors and people on AISH, why does the minister want our municipal partners to take the heat for yet another NDP tax increase?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. As the Premier said very well earlier today, we have the lowest taxes in the country, and that remains so. You know, the Official Opposition can't have it both ways. They can't be saying that they're going to have reckless cuts and then demanding that we invest more. We need to be prudently making good fiscal decisions, and that's what this government is doing.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall I asked the Minister of Municipal Affairs about a new tax category in the county of Smoky Lake called uncollectable taxes – these extra taxes were due to the uncollected linear tax from industry – and the minister didn't have a good answer for me then, but she assured me that the government was committed to working with municipal governments to meet their revenue shortfalls. How is this government helping municipalities and ratepayers by saddling them with yet another tax burden?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The truth is that our government is fully committed to providing municipalities with the tools and resources they need to serve Albertans. We are investing \$34 billion in necessary roads, schools, transit, and other public infrastructure to provide communities with the facilities they need. We are working hard within our budget to be responsible fiscal managers. We take that responsibility seriously. But again I have to say: spend money, you know, but don't spend money. Spend money; don't spend money.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Job Creation

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Small and medium-sized business are the backbone and job creators of Alberta. Their entrepreneurial spirit creates, sustains, grows, and diversifies the provincial economy. The most competitive business climate in Canada, known to many as the Alberta advantage, previously allowed them to succeed. This government instead introduced the 27,000 jobs plan, scrutinized by our caucus and the business community. To the minister of economic development: for the record, how many jobs out of 27,000 did your plan create? Just a

number, please, not a list of hollow promises, programs, or one-job platitudes around creation of economic development.

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Quite frankly, our government has released a number of initiatives that we're doing to help small-business owners and entrepreneurs, starting last fall, when we made more than \$2 billion in capital available through ATB, through the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, and through AIMCo. As well, the Minister of Labour announced our STEP program, which is going to be accessible to small-business owners this year. Let's keep in mind as well that under our government we still have the lowest taxes in the country.

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

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll take that answer as one job.

Given that it is painfully obvious that this government's flagship job-creation strategies are destined for abysmal failure, it is time for a different approach, and given that the Engage document released today by the PC caucus outlines a viable alternative, the small-business venture capital tax credit, to the minister of economic development: will we see this tax credit in next week's budget? If not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know it's not the members' opposite strong suit to be patient, but what they do need to wait for is April 14, when the Finance minister will table the budget. All of the House and all of Alberta will see that our government is committed to working with the job creators – that's small businesses, entrepreneurs, and our industry friends – in order to help create the right conditions to create jobs in Alberta so that Alberta remains the best province to invest in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government promised Albertans a very nimble 27,000 jobs plan, that was doomed to fail, and given that small-business venture tax credits have been proven in neighbouring jurisdictions to return almost \$2 to the provincial treasury for every \$1 spent in tax credits – it seems this government is intent on another failed plan. To the Minister of Finance: given that this very common-sense idea could yield exceptional results, if the minister of economic development refuses to help businesses and communities around Alberta, will you?

2:30

Mr. Ceci: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade did not say that he wouldn't help. He's helping already. He's been involved with an international tour. He's been around this province. He'll continue to work as quickly and as hard as possible to support the economic development and trade that this province needs to get itself back on its feet. Stay tuned for April 14 at 3 p.m.

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, we know that gay-straight alliances and queer-straight alliances are providing essential supports for schools in Alberta. It's important to support students to continue

establishing these groups as it is their legal right. To the Minister of Education: what is being done to promote the establishment of GSAs and QSAs?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very important question. We know that GSAs have the potential to save lives, and we're going to do all we can to support these groups, to make sure that they're in all schools that want them. We all know that many schools already have gay-straight alliances, and we will continue to work with school boards to ensure that students who want to form a GSA or a QSA can do so in any school in the province of Alberta. We know that GSAs and antihomophobic policies in place within schools have a positive impact for all students in the schools and help to save lives.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I've heard some concerns from people who are worried about schools following through with implementation, the necessary policies to ensure that our students have the supports and protection that they need, again to the minister: what is being done to ensure that all authorities are following through with their legal responsibilities when it comes to establishing GSAs and QSAs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I've been visiting schools and meeting with students who belong to gay-straight or queer-straight alliances across the province. These students have been telling me how much it means for them to know that they are supported. They have told us that legislative changes to support LGBTQ students have the potential to save lives. The stakes of this work are very high, and I count on all of you here in this Assembly to help us get the job done.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You're right. It does save lives. I've actually known a lot of people that it's saved the lives of.

What other stories are you hearing from the community about the students involved in the GSAs and QSAs in the province, that make such a significant difference every day?

Mr. Eggen: Well, we certainly all know that when kids are being bullied or are experiencing stress, they don't do well in school. The School Act requires school authorities to ensure welcoming, caring, respectful, safe learning environments for all students and ensures that students who want to form a GSA or a QSA are able to do so. These laws, Mr. Speaker, are already in place. Again, the establishment of GSAs as well as other policies being followed in schools helps to ensure that the most vulnerable students can thrive in a welcoming, safe, and respectful school environment. We expect nothing less for all of our students in the province.

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

Government Agencies, Boards, and Commissions

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Culture and Tourism. There are many Alberta agencies, boards, and commissions under the Culture and Tourism banner. Alberta Finance defines ABCs as having some degree of autonomy from the government. They're arm's-length entities, independent boards

that are only required to report to the government once a year. Yet when I try and contact them, some have become tight-lipped and say that they need permission from the minister to speak to me. Is it possible that these so-called arm's-length ABCs are in fact being micromanaged by the minister?

The Speaker: The Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. Of course, that's not the case. What I understand is that there were some questions that were directed to different departments in the ministry. It is often the case that when you go into a ministry, the minister is informed that the questions have been asked, which I believe is normal practice. I believe that there is a review already under way for ABCs. We'll continue to do that, and once we have that report, we will present it to the Chamber.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, being informed is one thing, but given that I have received a letter from one of these minister's arm's-length agencies which told me that it could not meet with me without the minister's explicit permission, I fail to see how these boards are not being kept under the minister's thumb. Why do these organizations feel the need to seek permission from the minister instead of actually remaining at arm's length?

Miranda: Mr. Speaker, as the minister I am responsible for everything that happens in every single one of these agencies, boards, and commissions. Therefore, I will definitely – I do not know; I have not seen that letter. If you could please forward it to me, I will be able to talk more to it. But I can tell you right now that, absolutely, when everybody has a question, they come to the ministry and we decide how we allocate the resources and where I send the questions to.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, information is one thing, but given that the members opposite ran on a platform of an open and transparent government, I would expect these boards and commissions not to feel the need to warn the minister when a member seeks to speak with them. Can the minister explain exactly how these types of controlling relationships create the open and transparent government that the NDP promised?

Miranda: Mr. Speaker, again I have to say that when a question comes into the ministry, of course I'm going to be informed what the question is. If the member across wanted to have a question, all the member had to do was contact my office, and I would be more than happy to have that discussion. You know what? This is what a ministry is supposed to do. It's supposed to be transparent. It's supposed to be responsible. However, I am accountable for everything that happens in that ministry; therefore, yes, of course they're going to ask me what's going on.

Thank you.

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

Minimum Wage

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By now even this government must have seen that its minimum wage plan is hurting small business as well as the very people it wants to help. Our PC caucus's Engage document underlines the importance of a business-friendly environment for a strong economy. To the Minister of Labour:

given that an Alberta Chambers of Commerce survey indicated that businesses have laid off workers – since October 1 two-thirds of them have been minimum wage earners – what do your own numbers show about the wage hike's effect on unemployment for minimum wage employees?

The Speaker: Madam Minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We want to make sure that single parents working for minimum wage can take care of their families, and that is why we are supporting a phase-in of a \$15 an hour minimum wage. We are working with our stakeholders and our partners as we go through this process. I have reviewed the survey done by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce as well as met with the Alberta Chambers of Commerce as part of the engagement plan. In the meantime we are currently monitoring the situation so that we can make informed decisions about the phase-in as we move forward.

Mr. Ellis: Given that this government indicated that imposing a higher minimum wage would particularly help single mothers and underskilled workers and given that the wage hike is actually causing greater unemployment for these workers and given that the business community is offering common-sense solutions that will truly help underskilled workers and other low-income Albertans while maintaining their jobs, to the same minister: what are your comments on the business community's well-thought-out alternative solutions?

The Speaker: Madam Minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are continuing to engage our stakeholders like the business community to review their suggestions as we continue supporting the phase-in of a \$15 an hour minimum wage. Nobody who works a 40-hour work week should be going to a food bank to support their family. We will work with our partners and look at all ideas as we support that phase-in going forward.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you to the minister for mentioning "engage."

Given that the way this government is layering on costs for businesses shows a lack of understanding of economic realities and given that as our province's most diverse base the small-business sector is a critical job creator during economic downturns and given that, as predicted, this ill-thought-out wage plan is actually hurting the people this government claims it most wants to help, to the same minister: why do you insist on pigeonholing people into minimum wage jobs when you could work with the business sector and help prepare low-income Albertans for better jobs?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The member's premise of his first two questions is patently false as far as talking about all of the people earning minimum wage that are being laid off. Our government has been going around the province consulting with small businesses, looking for ways that our government can act as a partner with the business community. We recognize that small businesses account for 95 per cent of Alberta's GDP and that they are the economic drivers of our province. The member will have to wait for April 14, where all members of the House will see a number of initiatives our government is taking to support small businesses and ensure that Alberta is the best place . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

2:40

Royal Alberta Museum

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Downtown Edmonton is undergoing an unprecedented era of revitalization. There's a lot of new construction, including the construction of the new Royal Alberta Museum, and I've got to say that the residents of Edmonton-Centre were very excited for this great addition. We recognize that there are great benefits that come from tourism to our province, and the opening of this museum has the potential to have a big impact on our economy here in Edmonton-Centre. To the Minister of Infrastructure: can you give us an update here in the House on how the construction is proceeding for this project and when we can expect the museum to be open for Albertans to visit?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question, hon. member. I'm pleased to be able to report to the House that the construction of the new Royal Alberta Museum, right downtown next to city hall, is on time and on schedule and will be opening very shortly, some months from now. We'll be moving, then, the various displays and artifacts from the existing Royal Alberta Museum into the new one, and we're expecting it to open in 2017.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that with the opening of the new museum we are going to have an incredible opportunity and some real potential when it comes to redevelopment of the previous museum site and given that my office has received correspondence from many residents regarding its future use, again to the minister: does your department have at this time any specific plans for the Glenora Royal Alberta Museum site?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the public that no decision has been made about the future use of the existing museum building. Due diligence for the Royal Alberta Museum at the old location means looking at all of the options. We have experts in-house who are looking at those options to repurpose the facility. Once we have all of the information, we'll also explore all potential uses for that building.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, along those lines, given that the Glenora site for the RAM will be expected to be home to staff for about another three years, thus allowing a fair amount of time here for consideration, and given that I've spoken with many groups and individuals who have ideas for the site's reuse, again to the Infrastructure minister: when you make future decisions about the use of this property, will Albertans have a chance to comment on potential proposals?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the hon. member and all Albertans that this is an important facility. It will be in use for about three years as we transition to the new location – he's absolutely right about that – and we need to make careful, thoughtful decisions. There will be consultation with the community and with Albertans about the future use of that building.

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

Mountain View Seniors' Housing

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills we are blessed to have many nonprofits working towards the common good. One, Mountain View Seniors' Housing, operates seniors' lodges, self-contained apartments, and subsidized family housing in three local communities. It's come to my attention that more than a dozen of those provincially owned facilities operated by Mountain View Seniors' Housing are sitting empty, unable to be rented until urgent maintenance and repairs are completed. Is the Minister of Seniors and Housing aware of this situation, and what does she plan to do about it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, investing in seniors' housing, affordable housing, making sure that Albertans have the housing they need is very important to this government. As has been said already today, I recommend the member wait for the budget on April 14, and he'll see significant support in that area.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, for seniors on fixed incomes and for low-income families every nickel counts, and every tax increase this government imposes makes it more difficult. At a time when affordable housing is in such short supply, how can the minister justify allowing 13 properties out of only 20 that are available, including 40 bedrooms, to sit vacant and in a state of disrepair?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. This is a very important question. The truth is that when we came into government, there was a billion dollars of deferred maintenance needed, so he's very right that there are gaps and challenges in this area. We as a government are committed to investing in this area. We want Albertans to have the proper housing for seniors and for people on low incomes, and we're working to have that happen.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that nonprofits like Mountain View Seniors' Housing strongly support direct rent subsidies to prevent these kinds of long-term maintenance deficiencies and costs, what is the minister going to do to ensure these are repaired and/or additional rent subsidies are provided so that more individuals can be helped?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. This is an area that I'm very concerned about and very passionate about. I just want to assure him that we as a government are very committed to making sure that people have affordable housing in Alberta, making sure that seniors have homes that they can stay in and live well in, and that there are facilities that they can move to when needed. We're very much looking forward to telling you more details about that very shortly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Spider-Mable and Daffodil Month

Dr. Turner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is Daffodil Month, and I'm honoured to say that my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud is home to the local superhero Mable Tooke, who was here earlier. She's also known as Spider-Mable. Spider-Mable is a familiar face to Edmontonians and, in fact, the world after saving the Oilers captain Andrew Ference from an evil villain last year. Also last year, at a spinathon at Riverbend junior high I joined the Minister of Education and many politicians as well as sports figures and heard of Spider-Mable's heroics and her story as a cancer survivor, which offers hope to all Canadians living with cancer.

Mable was just four years old when she was diagnosed with ALL. She finished her last chemotherapy in November 2015, the day after her seventh birthday. But she knows the fight isn't over, and that's why she was here with her parents and her grandparents and her partners in cancer-fighting from the Canadian Cancer Society.

April is Daffodil Month, and our guests are asking us to purchase and wear the daffodil pin to show people living with cancer that they're not alone and to remember those this disease has taken. Mr. Speaker, I'm an oncologist who treats adult patients with ALL, and I, obviously, do clinical research. That research was supported by the Canadian Cancer Society and pursued in Edmonton and Calgary, and it has markedly improved the outlook for my patients and actually all patients in Canada with ALL. I'm a strong supporter of and a donor to the Canadian Cancer Society for over 35 years. We need to continue supporting them in this important research into preventing and treating cancer. That's why I challenge this House to stand with Spider-Mable and proudly wear this daffodil pin.

Thank you very much.

Hope Bridges Society

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak about a community-based not-for-profit organization in my constituency that works to change hearts and minds through the universal language of art, the Hope Bridges Society. The Hope Bridges Society grew out of Project HOPE, a therapeutic program in the Golden Hills school division for children aged 3 to 18 years with severe learning needs, including communication, cognitive, self-help, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties.

When children involved with Project HOPE graduated high school, there were still barriers to entering the next phases of their lives. To bridge the gap, a group of concerned community members in Strathmore got together and discovered that these children were not the only marginalized members in the community. There were seniors and new Canadians as well.

2:50

How can we support those with learning disabilities, seniors, and new Canadians who are isolated and build a stronger community? How can we reach the hearts and minds of everyone who lives in the area of Wheatland county so that everyone belongs and is valued? For Hope Bridges, they found the answer in the universal language of the arts, where they are not judged, where they are all uniquely valued, where everyone belongs and everyone is welcomed. The isolation is overcome by using the arts to promote connection and wellness through participation and inclusion.

On April 16 the Hope Bridges Society will hold its third annual fundraising art and wine auction at the Strathmore Golf Club, from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. I'll be there to support this terrific community organization, that sets such an excellent example for Albertans everywhere, and I hope that other members of this House will join me there, too.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The leader of the third party.

Progressive Conservative Engage Initiative

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a rich and diverse history. Together we have experienced prosperity and hardship, and through both we remain caring, innovative, and hard-working people seeking opportunity in striving to fulfill our potential. We share the vision of making that dream a reality for each and every Albertan.

Today the PC caucus kicked off a real conversation with Albertans by launching Engage. We are seeking frank and open feedback from Albertans. For us Progressive Conservatives this means going back to our roots. Simply telling people what we think is not consultation. What Engage does is that it goes to the next step. We are continuing the process of reaching out, listening, and learning. The web page is abpcmla.ca/engage. Our caucus does not have all the answers; with Engage we are encouraging and welcoming all feedback. We will share the feedback in the hope that hearing from Albertans concerned about their province will inspire this government to change course.

Whether we sit on the government or opposition benches, the priority needs to be getting Alberta back to work. The need to achieve good government does not stop regardless of who is sitting in the Premier's chair. Our PC caucus will draw on our experience in government and from the many wins and losses we have experienced over the years. As Albertans we want to see this province at its best, and we have many ideas that we are keen to share. We also know that we don't have all the answers, but we do know and we're confident that in partnership with other Albertans and those people who work for Albertans, we can move forward in a positive and constructive way.

We invite all of Alberta to join our PC caucus in recommending positive changes to the current government. Won't you engage us in this important conversation?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Edmonton Seahawks Football Club

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to tell you and all members of the Assembly more about the north Edmonton football association the Edmonton Seahawks. NEMFA is a nonprofit that was formed in 1993 and is one of only two organizations providing minor football to children and youth in north Edmonton. The Edmonton Seahawks clubhouse is in my constituency of Edmonton-Castle Downs.

The football program is offered to children and youth at four levels, serving boys and girls aged 8 to 17, providing a safe, affordable football opportunity to the children and youth in north Edmonton. The Seahawks promote teamwork, leadership, sportsmanship, and healthy lifestyles with a focus on development of participants. There are not any paid staff, and a child has never been turned away due to financial difficulty. They provide in excess

of 40 trained volunteers, made up of current parents, former parents, and former players that went through the program. The Seahawks motto is Once a Seahawk, Always a Seahawk.

Our family joined the Seahawks when our youngest son was eight. I have been a team manager, and my husband has been and still is one of the coaches. The players still call me Lady Coach. Our son played on the peewee team last year, and they won the city tier 3 championship. Many parents and players from other Seahawks teams were there to cheer them on.

The Edmonton Seahawks have strong relationships with their community and with the Edmonton Eskimos. The Eskimos have been involved with the program for many years, and players have come to our practices to meet the children and to participate in practice. The Seahawks have also been invited to Eskimos games to cheer on the players through the tunnel run and to play half-time matches against other minor football teams.

Thank you to the board members that are here today. Go Seahawks go.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead. Please remain seated, hon. member.

Lignin Recovery Plant in Hinton

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government is positioning the province as a leader in addressing climate change issues by encouraging the use of renewables. I'm proud to say that West Fraser Mills Hinton Pulp, a company in my constituency of West Yellowhead, is a true leader pioneering this change. Hinton Pulp, with their partners FPInnovations and EcoSynthetix Corporation, are encouraging the use of lignin, a natural glue that holds wood together, as an alternative to petroleum-based resin. Hinton Pulp, by using FPInnovations patented LignoForce process to recover lignin from black liquor, will see the construction of Canada's first commercial lignin recovery plant.

The 30-ton-per-day lignin petroleum recovery plant is expected to be a boon to industries looking to incorporate lignin into their product lines. This \$37.5 million project has been funded in part by federal and provincial government programs and has received major investments from individual entrepreneurs and companies.

If processed properly, lignin can replace petroleum-derived resins used intensively in manufacturing of plywood and other engineered wood products. Lignin is as good as conventional petroleum-based resin and has the potential to lower production costs. Most importantly, it cuts down on greenhouse gas emissions.

The demand for lignin is forecasted to grow as more companies find suitable applications. To meet these growing demands, the Canadian codevelopers Noram engineering and FPInnovations intend on marketing the LignoForce system to other kraft mills trying to capitalize on their black liquor.

Current research focuses on diversifying the use of lignin as an adhesive application for plywood and other products.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Tourism Promotion

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the weather starts to get nicer and spring and summer travel plans begin to take shape, I'd like to highlight the incredible opportunities that are available in Alberta tourism. As many in this House will know, tourism is a significant driver of our province's economy. Especially with the current downturn that our province is facing, attracting visitors and

encouraging Albertans to stay local during their spring and summer vacations is incredibly important. According to tourism stats almost two-thirds of Alberta tourism expenditures come from Albertans. With a low Canadian dollar and many Albertans having to cut back due to the current economic climate, staying in Alberta for a summer vacation does make good sense.

A quick Google search shows that articles are showing up in papers in Canada and the U.S., even the *LA Times*, marketing Alberta as the place to go this summer. I couldn't agree more. From the badlands to the Rockies, the Taste of Edmonton to the Calgary Stampede and, yes, even the Ponoka Stampede, world-class fishing in northern Alberta, other things: there's so much to see and do across our vast province. I know that my family will be enjoying Alberta's great backyard this summer, and I would encourage all members of the House to spread the same message and do the same.

Finally, I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that the NDP government isn't actually helping encourage tourism in our province because of the \$3 billion carbon tax. The fact of the matter is that the higher cost of keeping the lights on in a hotel or filling up on a tank of gas will inevitably be downloaded to that tourism consumer. I sincerely hope the NDP government will re-examine this risky and ideological antitourism policy.

Presenting Petitions

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

Ms McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I request leave to present the following petition that has been received for private bills under Standing Order 98(2): the petition of Laird Hunter, counsel to the Bow Valley Community Foundation, for the Bow Valley Community Foundation Repeal Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to request the unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 7(7) to allow the daily Routine to be concluded.

[Unanimous consent denied]

3:00

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 201 Election Recall Act

[Debate adjourned March 14: Mr. Cyr speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon to close debate.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to close debate on second reading for Bill 201, the Election Recall Act, and I do so with mixed feelings. This debate has highlighted for me the real strengths and weaknesses that are so clearly evident in our Westminster parliamentary form of democracy. This Legislature is made up of talented individuals chosen by the people of Alberta to be able to work together because of our commitment to this experiment in governance that we call democracy. Yet, obviously,

we are divided by political ideology, human frailness, individuality, and indeed uniqueness.

Let me be clear. This is a private member's bill. I did not ask my leader for permission to present this bill, but out of courtesy I informed him and my caucus. This is not an opposition bill, although it may have the support of some of the opposition. Nor should it be a mystery to this House if many of the Wildrose support this bill, as I am sure that many of our MLAs ran for the Wildrose Party because of our belief in recall.

There is only one MLA in this House that truly knows why this bill was chosen to be brought before the Legislature, and that person is myself. I brought this bill before this House to redress a serious imbalance of power that all Albertans know exists. A problem in our system, as I see it, is that all too often MLAs vote against the wishes of their constituents because of party discipline. I brought this bill before the Legislature because I believe, my constituents and many, many Albertans believe that it would make our democracy more accountable. Full stop. That's the reason.

So many of the concerns against this bill that argued it was a way to get around financing laws are mistaken. This bill is not an orchestrated attack by the opposition because we didn't like the results of the election. Indeed, the bill builds in an 18-month threshold before recall could be enacted to deal with that scenario. Similarly, this bill was not an attempt to do an end run around financing laws, which we the Wildrose voted along with the government to enact earlier this year. These and other arguments were nothing but political posturing and a visible reflection of the problem of how party politics can warp the debate in this House.

However, there were arguments presented that had merit in my eyes. For those members who had issues with this bill, I strongly suggest that you support the bill in principle and send it to Committee of the Whole. I assure the hon. members that I will be open to all amendments that would improve this bill, especially those around the thresholds of numbers and financing. That is how democracy is supposed to work. The creating and passing of legislation should be a collaborative effort of all of the MLAs in this House.

So I say to this House that a vote against this bill will not be a vote against thresholds and financing or other arguments that I have heard. Instead, a vote against this bill will be a clear reflection that you do not believe in the principle of recall. I leave it to you and your constituents to figure out at the next general election the importance of your rejection of recall as a way to improve our democracy.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster addressed the long-standing debate about whether an MLA is elected to simply obey the wishes of his or her constituents or has the autonomy to use his or her own judgment and to vote in disagreement with those who elected him or her. My answer to your concern is that recall will impact this debate in at least one way; it shifts the balance. Presently the MLA will often place his or her party's concerns above those of their constituents. With recall, a new balance evolves. The MLA must give more consideration to those who elected them while still wrestling with their conscience and the desires of their party. A vote against this bill will not eliminate personal conscience or the requirement to defend minority rights from the tyranny of the majority, but it will ensure that you must carefully consider the wishes of your constituents when you make your decision.

I close this debate with an appeal to this House for the support of this bill in principle. Send this bill to Committee of the Whole, where amendments can be proposed and either accepted or rejected.

Once this process has occurred, then the final judgment on this bill should be rendered by the House.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:06 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Pitt
Anderson, W.	Jean	Schneider
Barnes	Loewen	Smith
Cooper	MacIntyre	Strankman
Cyr	Nixon	Taylor
Fildebrandt	Orr	van Dijken
Hanson	Panda	Yao

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Nielsen
Babcock	Hoffman	Payne
Bilous	Horne	Phillips
Carlier	Jabbour	Piquette
Ceci	Jansen	Renaud
Clark	Kleinsteuber	Rosendahl
Connolly	Larivee	Sabir
Coolahan	Littlewood	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Drever	Mason	Starke
Drysdale	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Ellis	McKitrick	Swann
Feehan	McLean	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	McPherson	Turner
Goehring	Miller	Westhead
Gotfried	Miranda	Woollard
Gray		

Totals: For – 21 Against – 55

[Motion for second reading of Bill 201 lost]

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

The Speaker: Yes, hon. member.

Point of Order

Division

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order, something that has created some concern for me. I think that it's perhaps instructive and useful for members of the House to be reminded of a matter of decorum during the course of divisions.

That matter of decorum is that during divisions, according to page 639 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, there is to be no movement around the House, and indeed there is supposed to be no noise in the House from the time that the question is put, while the Clerk is conducting the important work of taking the roll and calling the votes. I will remind the hon. members that during that time it is indeed the Clerk who has the floor and that all comments that are made on either side of the House are not recorded in *Hansard* and therefore do not become part of the public record. However, we have seen in the past and we saw again today that as

soon as certain hon. members stood to vote on an issue, they had comments directed in their direction. This is inappropriate. Votes should be taken, and hon. members should be treated as honourable members and allowed to vote their conscience and vote according to the procedures.

Although Standing Order 32, which deals with divisions in our standing orders, does not specifically make reference with regard to the conduct of members during the course of divisions, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* is very clear. We have seen, in fact, in a number of cases during the course of taking divisions in this House where that practice has not been followed. I would just encourage and urge you, Mr. Speaker, to encourage hon. members to follow that practice in the future.

The Speaker: Are there any other comments? The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just rise very briefly to thank the hon. member for raising the point of order today. Certainly, on behalf of the Wildrose caucus I'll take this under advisement, and if there's anything that we can do to add to the process during recorded divisions, we'd be happy to assist.

The Speaker: Are there any other comments?

Hon. member, thank you for drawing it to my attention, to the House's attention. I think the point is well taken. I did not see movement, but I thought I heard some sound. I think the principle that's being addressed to all sides of the House is: show respect at this crucial time. The hon. member is correct. It is the Clerk's floor at that particular time. It's a crucial part of the process, voting, and I'd ask that each of you show respect.

Bill 202

Alberta Affordable Housing Review Committee Act

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

Ms Luff: Mr. Speaker, thanks so much for allowing me to rise and speak about the Alberta Affordable Housing Review Committee Act. I was very happy to hear that there's been lots of debate about affordable housing in the House today and in the past weeks, and I'm very excited to get the opportunity to talk about it again.

I just want to thank the members of my constituency of Calgary-East, whom I'm proud to represent here today. The idea for this bill arose from conversations that I've had with constituents on their doorsteps and in my constituency office. These people are our seniors, single parents, new Canadians, and women escaping violence. I've spoken with municipal officials and local organizations like Horizon Housing, Women Together Ending Poverty, Momentum, Sunrise Community Link, the Calgary Housing Corporation, the Wood Buffalo housing corporation, and the Alberta chapter of the Canadian Home Builders' Association. I just want to take a second to acknowledge Jim Rivait and Wendy Jabusch, who are here in the House this afternoon to watch debate on this bill.

All of these organizations are aware of the problem. We have too many people having a hard time finding and keeping a home here in Alberta. There's much expertise available in Alberta to draw from and much work being done. The aim of this bill is to hear from many Albertans and to take a big-picture look at this crucial issue. I want to allow a committee to conduct a comprehensive review of affordable housing issues in this province. I want a committee to make recommendations that would make Alberta a province committed to housing security, a province where every Albertan

has a safe, secure place to call home. These are recommendations that I hope will be realized.

Mr. Speaker, affordable housing is a priority for Albertans, and therefore it is a priority for our government. In order for housing to be considered affordable, it needs to cost less than 30 per cent of a household's before-tax income. Households exceeding 30 per cent are said to be in core housing need. Thousands of Albertans are in core housing need at this time. The latest census data, from 2011, found that over 23 per cent of renters in the province and approximately 10.7 per cent of all households in the province are in this core housing need. In 2015 the Edmonton Social Planning Council reported that the number of households in core housing need was trending upwards in the Edmonton area.

I'd like everybody to take a moment and just imagine someone who is in this situation, someone who makes \$15 an hour, which is currently above minimum wage. Thirty per cent of that person's monthly income is \$800 before taxes. I don't know if you've tried to find somewhere to live in Calgary or Edmonton or, really, anywhere in the province for \$800 a month, including utilities, lately. I think you'll find that it's extremely difficult.

3:30

I have a friend and former constituent who was able to come to Calgary and to leave her naturally devastated country of Nepal after the earthquake. She came here to try and make a better life for herself and for her young son; however, once she was here, her life took a turn into further, more difficult circumstances. Her husband became physically violent. She was fortunately able to flee with her young son, and she was helped by a women's shelter. However, at a point you have to leave a women's shelter, as we've discussed previously in the House.

This friend of mine had to find affordable housing, and she had to find daycare for her son. Her son had to move schools. This woman makes \$12 an hour working full-time at a fast-food restaurant. She looked for a suitable apartment for half a year, and she was finally able to secure a one-bedroom basement suite. Now, this suite is not legal. It doesn't have a separate entrance. It doesn't have separate laundry, and it's located, you know, some days an hour away from her job via transit. Now, it does include free Wi-Fi, but I still think she's not getting a very good deal.

Housing is a basic human right. It's something that we learn about in school very early on. I recall from fourth grade, la quatrième année de Mlle Labonté, that we learned about the human need for food and shelter and water, and we made posters about those things. Humans' need for shelter is something that we learned very early on in school. In fact, as I learned later on in school, there are many fundamental human rights. Adequate housing is a fundamental human right enshrined under article 25 of the UN declaration of human rights. Safe, adequate housing is essential to social well-being.

Mr. Speaker, emergency shelters are not adequate housing, and cars are not adequate housing. It's not acceptable for someone to be asked for six months of rent up front. It's not acceptable for someone's rent to go up hundreds to thousands of dollars with only three months' warning. What are we saying as a society when mortgages on most three-bedroom houses cost less than the monthly cost of renting a two-bedroom apartment?

Housing in Alberta is at a crisis point. My office deals with people who want to get into Calgary Housing every day. I have spoken with a father of a new Canadian family who has cancer, who wants to make sure that his wife and children are cared for. I've spoken to seniors on fixed income. I've spoken to, you know, a single mom whose roommate moved out, and she couldn't afford the rent anymore. These are all people who need social housing and

who are precariously housed. They are at risk of becoming homeless, and I have to tell them that the wait-list is huge. There are over 3,000 people on the wait-list to get into Calgary Housing and more than 15,000 people on the wait-list for social housing across Alberta. Wait times vary depending on the housing program or the type of housing requested.

I just want to tell you about another constituent who's in this situation, who's been on the wait-list for Calgary Housing for over a year. He's from Afghanistan. He's lived here in Canada for three years, and he works the night shift at Cargill as a side puller. This man lives in a three-bedroom house with five other adults. One of the bedrooms in that house is occupied by a whole family that has a baby. He lives in this situation because despite working full-time and taking English classes during the day, he can't afford his own apartment. His rent has recently also been increased.

There's a steadily increasing demand for affordable housing, but we have limited supply, as has been noted. Alberta is expected to grow by more than a million people in the next decade and two million people by 2041. This is a problem that urgently needs to be addressed, and it's not something that's going to disappear.

Alberta's affordable housing infrastructure is also aging. Many of the buildings are between 30 and 60 years old, and operating costs, including utilities and repairs, are increasing. Very few social housing units have been constructed since 1993, which is when the federal government stopped funding social housing.

We're facing difficult times in Alberta right now. Right now in Alberta more people are facing the possibility of homelessness. I would submit that hard times are, in fact, the best times to invest in solutions that will help our most vulnerable immediately and will help all of us in the long run. In difficult times Albertans have always worked together. Our government will not leave our most vulnerable neighbours behind, and this bill supports that commitment. I'm proud to be part of a government that is committed to making thoughtful decisions about how we move forward with respect to affordable housing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this bill seeks to establish a committee that is tasked with developing recommendations to ensure all Albertans have the benefits of safe, appropriate, and affordable housing. The committee will make recommendations to ensure Albertans can enjoy the human right of housing security. There hasn't been a committee on affordable housing since 2007, which was under very different economic circumstances, but housing remains a critical issue whether the economy is booming or contracting because each situation puts pressure on low-income households' ability to maintain housing.

There are too many Albertans, my constituents and yours, who are working hard to provide good lives for themselves and their children but have to deal with situations that make this very difficult. I believe that everyone here in this room wants to make a positive difference in the lives of Albertans. I believe that all Albertans – those in low-wage jobs, those with disabilities, seniors who've worked their whole lives in Alberta – should be able to afford their own safe, legal home. Mr. Speaker, I'm hopeful that we can do better for people, that every Albertan can have a comfortable place to call home, a place that they don't need to fear will be taken away from them.

Now, I do have a whole section on work that's currently being done, but as I am running out of time, I will leave that to further debate. I do want to acknowledge that there is plenty of work being done by excellent nonprofits and local organizations all over the province to fill the gaps that are due to a lack of planning on behalf of previous provincial and federal governments.

Really, people who know me know that I'm a big-picture person. I'm a systemic change person. I know that the social housing

solutions of the '70s aren't going to work for us today here in Alberta. We need new ideas. This is why I want to strike a committee instead of choosing to propose specific solutions. In order to achieve a change that works – whether that change is in a business, whether that change is in a school, whether it's in a community – you have to consult the people who are affected, and you have to use their ideas. For a problem of this magnitude we need a made-in-Alberta solution. A committee is a democratic process where everyone can be heard and all voices can be considered.

To achieve systemic change in how we house people, we need not only include but embrace all stakeholders. We need to honour all points of view on such a dynamic issue and set upon a course that examines our options in creating the most equitable path forward. Issues I've included in my bill are issues my constituents care about: rent regulation, mobile-home park rent, security deposits, and affordable home ownership. These are things I've said that I would work on, but I do want to note that the bill is not limited to those considerations. I wanted to keep it wide open.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. To confirm, you did say that you are moving second reading of Bill 202?

Ms Luff: Second reading, yes.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I would recognize the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 202 and the concerns I have with this bill as it is presently laid forth. Albertans are taking note of this government's dependency on creating endless reviews on matters such as the one before us, the Alberta Affordable Housing Review Committee Act. If this government insists on pushing these reviews instead of taking real action to help Albertans as they suffer during this economic downturn, they should at least be formulated in such a way that this can be helpful. Reviews like this should be launched with a careful balance between the dichotomy of market assessment and policy recommendations. Unfortunately, this government has tipped the scales of this review toward the side of policy recommendations. Their decision to do so only shows that the NDP government is becoming increasingly less concerned with market realities and more concerned with slanted recommendations.

The meat of this bill is contained in section 3(2), which stipulates that the report must include:

- (a) rent regulation;
- (b) rent subsidies;
- (c) security deposits;
- (d) affordability of rental rates including rates for the rental of mobile home sites;
- (e) affordability of home ownership and mechanisms to support affordability.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important that we start here. This proposed piece of legislation is a bill to create a committee to create recommendations to the minister on those five areas and others.

However, as I talk with more and more stakeholders, I'm hearing nothing but concern for the direction of this bill, and some of them are wondering about its very necessity. The concerns I'm hearing have to do with the possibility of rent control or other red tape and regulations that would discourage homeowners from becoming landowners, which would then, in turn, reduce the overall number of affordable rental properties available. Is the government hoping

this review will produce specific results that will support its ideological agenda and ultimately lead to rent control?

3:40

My question arises from a *Calgary Herald* article from October 2014 in which the Premier told the *Herald* that “the government should implement a form of rent control.” The Premier said, “If we leave it to the market, there will end up being a market for tent space in this park.” She said this last year while in downtown Calgary. Throwing around this extremely naive view of how the free market works is a shameless scare tactic used by the NDP across the country to advocate for large governments and overregulation.

Thankfully, in June of 2015, in another *Herald* statement, the then Municipal Affairs minister, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, said that

a lot has changed in the last year, and rent controls are not on the table for the government.

He said:

I can tell you, quite frankly, that our government is not at this time looking to rent controls.

He went on.

I can tell you in the same breath that we are focused on working with cities, with municipalities to ensure that we are building more affordable housing units... Our current direction is looking at working with municipalities to supply more housing so that rents can come down.

I don't think we need to look much further to understand why we're all a bit confused to be discussing a government-supported private member's bill that wants to establish a committee to review rent regulations. I believe Albertans, property owners, and tenants need to hear that this government has once again committed to a proper balance of regulations which benefit the people who really need help instead of treating private property as a government-owned public facility.

Wildrose believes in consultation, and since reading this bill, I have spoken with many stakeholders and consulted many leaders of those who work with those who need affordable housing. Of all of those I spoke with, there is only one group – only one – that said that they had actually been consulted. Many groups are telling me that they are downright concerned that this government already doesn't have this type of information. They keep asking me: where is the minister on this file? As review after review comes down the pipe, my honest answer is that I have no idea. This is information that the government should already have. By introducing this bill, the government has as much as admitted that it does not have a plan for dealing with social issues such as affordable housing in our province. Why else would our minister be directed by one of their own?

While the other side will be quick to dismiss my concerns as fearmongering or deny that this bill is connected to social issues, I want to remind them of our support for Motion 501. In March the Wildrose agreed to a review of current policies and strategies with a view to increasing community capacity to deliver transitional and low-barrier housing for vulnerable Albertans suffering from complex mental and physical health needs. This was a review that aligns with our policy of protecting our most vulnerable Albertans, and it is unique in its status as a specific issue-based review.

This bill, on the other hand, is a broad, overarching review aimed at providing policy recommendations with no real mention of a quantitative market review. It shows that private members are not doing their own research to either understand their own policies or the research that already exists. The hon. member may not know this, but the province currently has a board comprised of stakeholders and government officials who advise the minister on housing and rental related matters. I'm referring, of course, to the

ARTAC, the Alberta Residential Tenancies Advisory Committee. It seems that the member hasn't thought about utilizing already existing infrastructure within the government and furthermore has not asked the stakeholders already working in the industry to share information on what they know.

I'm also concerned about the committee this bill proposes to strike. As the bill currently stands, the members of the NDP government cabinet will be the only ones to have any say about who will be on this committee. Even with our other concerns I would like to point out that a nonpartisan appointment through the Standing Committee on Families and Communities would have allowed representatives of all Alberta's elected parties to have a say on the committee's members, which would have made this bill much more palatable. When bills are crafted so poorly and with such haste, it is not hard to see why all sectors of our economy and Albertans themselves are losing trust with this government.

Last year Albertans watched as the government announced a review on royalties in the oil and gas sector at a time when Alberta could least afford it. The economic realities were weighing heavy on industry, and the livelihood and jobs of many Albertans were on the line. This government forged ahead with a lengthy, delayed review which caused regulatory uncertainty that was bad for our economy, bad for investment, and bad for Alberta. How do they think this review is any different? Without any clear need for reporting and coming as it does on the heels of a previous commitment not to overregulate the market, why are we asking to approve a study that would open the door to more regulation? There will be a high level of uncertainty in the market, and investment will surely slow down while this committee crafts a new way to save our housing market.

But the government isn't using common sense. That's an old saying: if it's not broke, then don't fix it. I can't help but think that this bill is trying to fix a housing market that isn't broken. If this bill receives the cabinet's support, it will reopen the idea of policies like rent control. Every single person, agency, group that we consulted is a hundred per cent against rent control. Before we continue this conversation, the NDP needs to be honest about its agenda or come forward again in this House and state that it is against rent controls and needless government overregulation. Will the government clearly state its position?

This is the second private member's initiative that calls on the Seniors and Housing minister to produce action on her file. It is already within the minister's power to conduct these studies at any point. Whether the minister is collecting this information and choosing not to share it in this Assembly or whether there is just no information being collected at all, either way, the situation on this file is concerning.

Wildrose would like to see the scales back in balance, back toward a true market assessment focused on data, not heavily tipped toward policy recommendations from a committee hand-picked by the NDP. As legislators we should be the ones debating policies and learning from the data. Lazy governments in the past hid behind reviews, and this is not something we want to see continue. We're paid by our constituents to stand up, discuss the issues, and take meaningful action on behalf of Albertans. I think we should get back to that and stop trying to change Alberta one review at a time. Albertans are looking for a government that shows leadership and that stands up for them on the issues that matter with meaningful action, not endless, needless reviews.

For these reasons I will not support Bill 202 in its current form. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Member for Calgary-East for bringing forward this important bill. It's a big-picture bill, as the member rightly stated, and it's a bill that will touch much more than simply the items that it says must be included: rent regulation, rent subsidies, security deposits, affordability of rental rates. It is not limited in any way, shape, or form to those four items. It's a much bigger review than those four items might entail.

One of the most fundamental social determinants of health is safe, clean, well-maintained, affordable housing, and it's an issue that's close to my heart. I've been trying to cultivate my knowledge of the issue since being elected and meeting with stakeholders over the last 10 months to determine that this issue receives the attention it deserves. I'm, once again, grateful to the Member for Calgary-East for bringing it forward.

Affordable housing means a lot of things, a lot of different things, and it touches all of us. There's a perennial shortage, as the Member for Calgary-East indicated, of affordable housing in this province. Now, in 30 years as a realtor prior to becoming elected, I noticed difficulties in the area of housing where people weren't able to satisfy their needs with affordable housing and that the majority of people who were suffering a lack of affordable, decent housing were children and single mothers. Now, this teaches all of us to pay attention to this perennial shortage.

I was with homeEd for over six years, which is a city of Edmonton nonprofit housing corporation, and during those six years not one unit of affordable housing were we able to build or add to the portfolio. So it's been a common problem for housing management bodies throughout the province for decades that we've not been able to add to our housing stock and our portfolio, nor have we been able to properly fund the maintenance of this housing stock so that it's properly managed so that the people who need it most have the most fundamental right that they own, and that is to have an affordable, safe, clean, well-maintained property to live in.

Now, there's a wealth of experience on both sides of the House with respect to affordable housing. Many hon. members of both sides of this House, not only myself, have in their previous lives, before becoming elected, acted as volunteers in the affordable housing field. I respect that other members in this Assembly from both sides of the House really are knowledgeable about this issue. I think it's very well understood that we have not done well over the last 20 or so years in this province to not only keep up with the demand for affordable housing but also to maintain the housing stock that we have. All who have been involved will know that stakeholders are anxious to participate in a long overdue review of affordable housing in Alberta.

3:50

Now, it's not something that is going to be focused resolutely on rent regulation. It's a private member's bill that has a big picture in mind, and it'll be a much larger, encompassing review of affordable housing in the province. Clearly, it's not limited to simple rent control aspects of the bill. Safe, affordable, and appropriate housing is a priority for this government, but this is a private member's bill. We are committed to making thoughtful decisions about how we move forward with respect to affordable housing.

The latest census data, in 2011, found that over 23 per cent of renters in the province were in core housing need; 10.7 per cent of all Alberta households, or 137,485 households, were in core housing need. Now, the Edmonton area community plan forecasted a gap of 22,000 affordable housing units in the city by 2015. They also forecasted a shortfall of 2,000 supportive housing units and 1,150 permanent supportive housing units. Some populations are more affected by housing challenges than others, particularly

indigenous people, and newcomers make up a higher percentage of renters in core housing need.

So this is a pan-provincial problem that all members, I believe, should be interested in solving and really reaching out to all stakeholders across the province who have not had an opportunity to voice themselves towards the province in a really energetic way and in a comprehensive way.

It's a much wider issue than simply rent regulations and rent control. Whether you're talking about housing first; whether you're entering housing from homelessness; whether you're talking about families looking to gain an apartment that's affordable to them, that's clean, coming out of downtrodden housing which is unhealthy or unsafe or unaffordable, where they're spending 40 per cent, 50 per cent of their income on housing needs; whether you're looking at housing our seniors or those who are mentally ill, there's a vast panoply of housing needs in this province that really needs to be examined, and the time to do it is now.

We don't need to go forward without consulting the individual stakeholders who, in my 10 months of having been elected, are really thirsty for an examination, for a platform, for a venue within which they can review with government the real needs that exist and have existed for a long, long time.

Now, the bill seeks to establish a committee tasked with developing recommendations to ensure that all Albertans have the benefits of safe, appropriate, and affordable housing. It's not something we should take lightly. It's something that shouldn't be dismissed as just another review. It's a fundamentally important subject to people right throughout this province, urban as well as rural. There's a need for affordable housing in smaller rural communities that is not being met. Every Albertan needs a safe place to call home. The concept of housing security shows that when individuals have their personal security and a safe place to live in, other challenges in their lives become easier to confront, whether health challenges or employment, education or addictions. Safe, affordable housing is a human right. The UN Human Rights Council recently adopted a resolution recognizing the right to adequate housing.

We are committed to making thoughtful decisions about how we move forward with this, and that's why I support the concept of a bill which creates a review committee that allows all the stakeholders to coalesce and really bring their message forward to government about the necessity to make changes to affordable housing in a very thoughtful way and a long-term way and a sustainable way, a way that perhaps looks at innovations and creative solutions to affordable housing that haven't yet been tried in this province. Rather than looking at simply granting money, maybe you look at doing things that are incentives to create affordable housing that is sustainable, whether the financial input the government puts into affordable housing is a seed that allows a new framework of affordable housing to actually function in perpetuity without continuous injections of cash from the provincial government over the long term.

There are ways of incorporating mixes of market rent and subsidized renters within the same building. That was the homeEd model. We had an 80 per cent, 20 per cent mix of market renters versus subsidized renters. The market renters had no idea that there were subsidized renters within the building, but there was a cross-subsidization that took place. It was a healthy model, so you weren't creating ghettos of affordable housing or subsidized housing within a whole complex right throughout one corner of the city. It's important that communities share the responsibility for affordable housing so that it's implemented and that it's built within every corner of the city, no matter what community it happens to be.

Right now there are about 66,000 affordable housing units in Alberta with another 7,800 under development. Now, these housing units are located in communities throughout Alberta. With these units government is serving over a hundred thousand individuals, including low-income seniors, single parents, immigrants to Canada, and individuals with specialized housing needs. Alberta Seniors and Housing works with over 300 community-based organizations, including municipalities, nonprofits and for-profit organizations, and housing management bodies to deliver housing and related supports to Albertans. There are over 108 housing management bodies managing over 45,000 housing units in 250 communities across Alberta.

This is not something that is a small issue; it's something that we need to really sit down and review properly. This committee will allow these housing management bodies as they coalesce into umbrella organizations to properly present their arguments to this committee.

What I'd like to encourage all members to do is to support the bill.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I rise today to speak to Bill 202, the Alberta Affordable Housing Review Committee Act. We do need to have a conversation on governance. I think this conversation needs to start happening now here in this House. It starts with us taking a look at ourselves and asking: what are our roles? For instance, the government is comprised of the cabinet of ministers, the backbench is comprised of government MLAs, and the opposition is made up of different parties' members whose duty it is to hold the government to account on legislation on issues as big as budgets and as small as private members' motions.

All too often in this House we in opposition rise to ask questions and raise concerns for the purposes of fulsome debate in the best interests of all Albertans. Full, reasoned debate is not what this ideological NDP government or its backbench is interested in. Instead, they rely on scare tactics and rhetoric to say that we are not up on social issues. This couldn't be farther from the truth, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose is one hundred per cent committed to governing this province in the best interests of all Albertans and, in particular, in the interests of the most vulnerable. We support good legislation and good motions when they will benefit Albertans, and, of course, we also have the duty to our constituents and to this province to oppose bills that are not in their interests.

I've had the opportunity to join my colleagues in engaging with many stakeholders over the last few days, and I can tell you that people are really confused. They're telling us they are concerned with how this government rolls out its policies. We all know the NDP record on consultation leaves something to be desired. Whether it's oil royalty reviews, come-and-be-told meetings for farmers on Bill 6, or PDD sole-source contracting implementation, one thing remains clear; this government rarely consults, and when it does, it does poorly. One stakeholder I talked to has actually spoken with this member.

We need some questions answered. Can the member tell this Legislature who it proposes the committee would consult in the process of this review? Does the member have a list? I have some suggestions I would like to put on the record right now – it will be helpful – Alberta government services; the Alberta Residential Tenancies Advisory Committee, ARTAC; Alberta government residential tenancies dispute resolution centre; Canadian Federation of Apartment Associations; Realtors Association of Edmonton; Real Estate Council of Alberta; Alberta Barrier-Free Council;

Calgary Residential Rental Association; and the Canadian Home Builders' Association. Those are just a few that you can put on that list. They should be on your list of those to speak to before you introduce legislation, yet many of these groups were not consulted before this bill was even tabled. When bills come forward, they should be based on consultation, on information that takes into account the facts on the ground and weighs the necessity of the legislation.

4:00

Unfortunately, this bill is not really necessary. This is a government and backbench that is antimarket and truly fails to recognize that the market adjusts down to the economic realities. This review is not grounded in economic reality and fails to provide the most fundamental component of a review, market assessment information. Without this type of assessment of the market any recommendation coming out of this review would be based solely on opinion. We need to be assured that the recommendations are not created without context. We have heard some concerns about rent control. I actually heard them in a speech today. The members opposite are so quick to attack landlords and bring in studies on rent control, but this is simply irresponsible, Mr. Speaker.

In June this government's Minister of Municipal Affairs stated, and I quote: I can tell you, quite frankly, that our government is not at this time looking to rent controls. End quote. "Time" is the key word in that phrase, Mr. Speaker, because now we have a government supporting a private member's bill to study rent controls. In what has become its trademark ideological fashion, this NDP government is going around creating regulatory reviews, which can create market uncertainty. This drives away investment. It's like there's an industry you guys don't want to mess with.

As my colleagues have said, this government must reaffirm its commitment that it is not going to legislate on such risky economic policies, which burden businesses with red tape and overregulation. Mr. Speaker, the reality is that rental property owners are not often huge corporations. These are regular people. They're seniors. They're Albertans who have temporarily left this province to find work, thanks to you, or people who have moved for other reasons, who haven't been able to sell their property because of the market slowdown. Some are just simply trying to get ahead. They're independent business owners running family operations.

While I recognize that the intent of the bill is to strike a committee to create recommendations, I do feel the government must be forthcoming and honest with its policies. Businesses and families are already hurting from the NDP tax hikes. Rental property owners need to be assured that this NDP committee will not advocate for increased regulation and decreased security for them. Not only is the review's purpose unnecessary and undesirable, but the bill itself shows just how little this NDP government understands its roles and capacities.

Getting back to our roles in this House, the backbench is not the place to be driving large-scale, sector-wide reviews. The minister actually already has the power to establish a review committee of this nature. Yet here we are debating a bill to create a committee which the minister could just appoint, which will report to the minister. Why? Why would the minister not just undertake the study? Is the minister not really interested in doing her job?

The committee this bill seeks to establish needs to be more transparent and accountable. The government has chosen to ask the Legislature to take on the responsibility of creating the committee but doesn't want the committee to be responsible to the Legislature. Why have it only report to the minister? Why wouldn't the government consider allowing it to be a two-way street and have the committee report to the members of this Assembly, the elected

officials? Albertans sent us here. This is just another example of how the new NDP has reversed its stance on the importance of transparency now that it's in power. We would like to see the NDP government undertake meaningful consultation to inform committees like the one this bill would establish. We all know how strong the NDP record is on consultation or lack thereof.

Wildrose is committed to protecting our most vulnerable and providing results, not time-wasting reviews like the former PC government. The government has the ability to produce a report that can inform results without passing a bill, and it's concerning that they haven't really figured that out yet.

So, unfortunately, I will not be supporting this bill. We all must do better. We must recognize our duties to bring forth strong policy recommendations that will help Albertans, instead of the endless reviews.

Thank you very much.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to be part of a caucus with such strong advocates for affordable housing, including the Member for Calgary-East. Bill 202 proposes the Alberta Affordable Housing Review Committee Act, which is in keeping with our government's priority for safe, affordable, and appropriate housing. What I particularly like about this bill is that it addresses the complexity of providing affordable housing by engaging all the stakeholders involved. Stakeholders include municipalities, nonprofit groups, housing co-operatives, developers, house providers, shelters, and organizations that specialize in the different stages of the life cycle such as organizations for seniors.

This bill also addresses the reality that there is not one solution or one approach but many solutions and approaches to providing affordable housing. This has been reflected in the recently released report in my own riding of Strathcona county that was endorsed by council.

A substantial portion of my career and my volunteer engagement has been about affordable housing. I was fortunate to be involved in innovative approaches. I also saw how diligent and vigilant one has to be to ensure that affordable housing is maintained in the community. I really want to talk about the need for diligence and vigilance when you're talking about affordable housing. I could cite many examples of why the Affordable Housing Review Committee Act is needed in this province and why we need to work together to ensure that affordable housing is created and maintained.

I'm just going to give you one example from my own experience. As a housing activist I found that the threat to affordable housing stock sometimes came from groups who should have known better than to devise schemes to remove tenants from rental properties. A management company for a low-rent housing complex in the municipality I was working with decided to evict the tenants so they could renovate the building into a luxury rental building. A number of the tenants decided to fight the eviction and to seek help. The developers went as far as shutting off heat to the complex, earning the ire of the local council, which became appalled at the action of the developers and became very public about the desire for developers and management companies to stop this action. The residential tenancy office issued a ruling in favour of the tenants, but each time the developers did not comply, seeking appeal to a higher court. If it had not been for the actions of the tenants, the leadership of the local municipal council, and the weekly protest in front of the developers' office, over 240 units of affordable housing would have been lost in this municipality.

This fight has shown me that retaining, building, and maintaining affordable housing requires diligence, watchfulness, and a commitment to ensuring a housing first approach in communities. This is what I'm hoping the committee that the act is going to create

will be doing for us in terms of affordable housing. I will therefore urge all members of this Assembly to support this bill and to demonstrate their commitment to planning and action on affordable housing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

4:10

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today on Bill 202, the Alberta Affordable Housing Review Committee Act. I want to preface my comments by acknowledging that I am certain that nobody in this place disagrees that there should be affordable housing available in Alberta. The Official Opposition caucus believes in positive affordable housing solutions. Unfortunately, while surely well intended, this bill may even hurt the economy if it results in risky experiments on the market or the perception that there could be new and onerous regulations, and it could actually provide fewer opportunities for families in need of affordable housing.

Now, this legislation as presented sets up a committee to review numerous aspects of the rental market: rental regulations; rent subsidies; security deposits; affordability of rental rates, including rates for the rental of mobile home sites; affordability of home ownership and mechanisms to support affordability. Earlier on today we heard from the Member for Edmonton-McClung that it truly is going to be talking about rent controls. Decisions in these areas can affect Alberta's rental markets greatly, but this bill as currently worded does not provide adequate detail on how consultations will be carried out on this matter. Frankly, this government's record on consultation is not exemplary, Mr. Speaker. We saw this, of course, with Bill 6 and the lack of consultation that this government bothered to do with farmers. There are questions about the consultation process.

The committee this bill seeks to establish needs to be more transparent and accountable. If the intention is to use the Legislature to create this committee, why has it chosen to make the committee accountable only to the minister? We know where this is going. We know where the Premier stands. As my colleague mentioned, in 2014 the Premier told the *Calgary Herald* that Alberta should implement rent controls, and the committee that this bill would set up could be the first step to that.

When prices are capped, people have less incentive to fix up and rent out their property or, frankly, to actually build more rental properties if they have the means. If there's decreased availability, landlords could become more selective with tenants and tenants may stay in more affordable properties longer than makes sense for their economic means given the smaller market that a rent-controlled environment creates. It's worth noting that evidence from New York shows that those living in rent-controlled apartments generally have higher median incomes than those who rent market-rate apartments. The losers in these scenarios are the very people the government is presumably trying to help through the bill.

I would encourage members to review one of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's rental market reports for Alberta. Here's what they'll see. Rental vacancies are going up. Rental demand is going down, specifically as a result of a weak labour market. Let me quote from CMHC's most recent Alberta rental market report for Alberta, released this past fall.

Reduced income growth and job prospects have contributed to reduced demand for rental housing . . . In terms of rental supply,

the overall universe of purpose-built rental apartments increased by 3,890 units in 2015, with the majority of the rise concentrated in two-bedroom units. This represents the second consecutive year the apartment universe increased, following declines from 2004 to 2013.

This is contrary to what we heard just earlier.

Low vacancies in the province over the past three years have contributed to more rental construction. By the third quarter of 2015, the total number of rental starts was already higher than any annual total since 1990.

You don't have to be an economist to know that in a market like that, no landlord will successfully rent out a property if they don't drop prices to meet the market.

Now, affordable housing is an issue for many Albertans because the economy is continuing in a downward spiral. We see this in Alberta's climbing unemployment rate, now the highest in 20 years. Just last week new Statistics Canada figures revealed that the average weekly pay in Alberta has dropped by over 4 per cent in the last year, a record drop.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The much broader issue isn't that Albertans are being squeezed out by escalating rent costs; the broader issue is that the job market is suffering and that more and more Albertans are struggling to make ends meet, not just to pay their rent but to meet all their other obligations as well. It is the broader context that we need to take a look at, Madam Speaker.

A committee can study affordable rental housing all they want, but that will not solve the real problem here. This government is treading water with no clear plan while the economy continues to decline. The economy is in a bad place. That shouldn't be a surprise to anyone here, but in an economy like this the government's priority should be to figure out what the barriers are to getting back on track to the Alberta advantage. Now is not the time for experiments with the rental housing market, especially when it can adversely affect so many Albertans.

I don't doubt for a moment that, unfortunately, there are unscrupulous landlords who are acting in bad faith with regard to the prices they ask for units, but it would be profoundly careless to allege that this is characteristic of all landlords in Alberta. The reality is that a great number of property owners and managers are everyday Albertans, and their rental units are their livelihoods. Who are we talking about here? They're seniors that rely on renting out property to supplement their sparse income in retirement. They're Albertans who have temporarily left our province to find work or people who have moved for other reasons and haven't been able to sell their property because of the market slowdown. While the government wants to establish a committee to review ways and means to bring rental prices down, the taxes, the expenses, the bills for property owners just seem to be going up on the way.

We know, for instance, that electricity costs are rising. There has been clear evidence in the last weeks that Alberta's electricity costs are heading in the same direction as Ontario's, and there are some significant warning signs for Alberta in the Ontario situation. It's a relevant detail to this discussion. Here's what happened. Ontario's coal-fired electrical plants were all shut down. As also seems to be the case in Alberta, nobody carried out a proper economic impact assessment to take into consideration how such a sudden shift from coal to other sources would impact everyday people, businesses, and families. According to information from the Association of Major Power Consumers, Ontario has the highest industrial electrical rates in North America. According to Ontario's Auditor General, during a single eight-year period Ontario electrical users paid a staggering \$37 billion more than the market price for their

electricity. I bring all of this up in this context because the rising cost of electricity and utilities under this government will likely be another pressure point on property owners, making the prospect of renting out their properties less and less gainful.

In conclusion, I want to say this. My colleagues and I in the Official Opposition believe that while the goal of this bill is worthy, the market intervention ultimately decreases options and choices for families and those who need affordable housing options. The reality is that many property owners who rent out housing are independent business owners or individuals looking to supplement their income. It's tough to see how they wouldn't be hurt by the effects of this bill. In this difficult economy rental property owners and all Albertans are looking for hope and looking for answers, not more regulations and especially not experimental regulations.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to begin by clarifying some misapprehensions of our colleagues across the aisle. To be clear, Bill 202 is a private member's bill. The bill's origin is solely with my colleague the Member for Calgary-East. I know this because I spoke with her at several points over the weeks during which she refined her vision and navigated the standard legislative process. I can also testify from my own work in developing and, yes, consulting on a potential private member's bill that our members have the freedom to independently explore areas of their own interest, discuss them with fellow caucus members and, yes, propose our own private members' bills.

I took the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon at his word today when he declared that the bill he put forward was of his own design and of his own volition. I would simply ask that the members opposite recognize that the Member for Calgary-East is simply doing the same.

That said, I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this bill. I believe that I can honestly say that since being elected, there has been no issue I've heard about more consistently from both residents and stakeholders across the spectrum than that of affordable housing. Just yesterday afternoon, as I was out door-knocking in my community, I met a young man who works for a local social agency. He echoed the concern that I've heard from community groups, from agencies, and from local business interests, that we as a society need to find new ways to increase accessibility to and the affordability of housing in our province. He spoke of the challenges many residents of Edmonton's downtown face in accessing or maintaining housing that they can afford. Madam Speaker, this is a growing problem.

4:20

My constituency office is two doors down from the Capital Region Housing Corporation, whose wait-lists for affordable housing and rental supplements grow increasingly unmanageable. Many on those lists come to my office seeking help in maintaining the housing they have or finding a new space that they can better afford. In fact, I recently received a report from the caseworker in my constituency office outlining her work in helping my constituents access and maintain housing. These cases comprise nearly 40 per cent of her work. With Alberta's population expected to grow by 1 million in the next decade and the aging of much of our current affordable housing stock, this problem is only going to get worse.

As I discussed this yesterday with my constituent, he also raised another housing concern. He noted that he and his partner had been recently forced to move from the building they'd called home for several years when they found that they were expecting a child and the building they were in was adults-only. It's worth noting, Madam Speaker, that Alberta is the only province in Canada which currently lacks provisions in its Human Rights Act to address this kind of discrimination.

Now, the gentleman that I was speaking with had greatly come to appreciate the convenience and diversity of living in our urban core but, like others I spoke with, found significant challenges in finding affordable, family-friendly housing there. Eventually they were fortunate to be able to take over the lease on a townhouse from friends who moved overseas. However, there are many others who find themselves forced to leave neighbourhoods they love, communities close to services they rely on, including public transit, social agencies, schools, and sometimes even their employment due to challenges of affordability and accessibility in securing family-friendly housing in our urban neighbourhoods.

Edmonton-Centre, in particular, is home to many new Canadians who take up residency in what is affordable though often very low-quality housing along the northern edge of our downtown core. These individuals build community as their children attend local schools. They play in the local parks. They're enrolled in child care in excellent local facilities like the Oliver Centre. However, as these families settle in and become more successful and look to secure a better quality of housing, whether through rental or ownership, they often find that they cannot affordably do so in the neighbourhoods and communities that they have come to call home. They are forced to move into more distant neighbourhoods, away from their cultural communities, where they often face increased costs and increased isolation.

While I'm incredibly excited for the economic potential that comes with the revitalization of our downtown core, I am also concerned about the effects that it may have on the affordability of housing in Edmonton's urban neighbourhoods and the effects this may have on vulnerable residents and families.

Now, I recognize that this is a complex issue. This involves many stakeholders across the spectrum, community groups and business and developers, many of whom I had the opportunity to speak with in the pursuit of my own considered private member's bill. So I thank my colleague from Calgary-East for bringing forward this bill. When we're at a time when all three orders of government are coming to the table and recognizing the need to once again invest in affordable housing and when so many of the developers, realtors, and others I have spoken to in the housing industry have expressed a willingness to speak and work with government to discuss how we can best address these problems, it makes sense to me to establish a committee that could consult with all of the stakeholders involved, draw on the considerable expertise available on all sides of this issue.

We can't afford to simply continue the status quo. We know that we're facing a problem that's been ongoing for some time. We know that it's a problem that can only get worse. I can't see the difficulty, I can't see the problem in simply wanting to sit down, talk with all individuals, consider all options and possibilities to ensure that all Albertans have the opportunity to have a safe and affordable place to live.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in second reading of Bill 202, the Alberta Affordable

Housing Review Committee Act. I don't think there's any question that this is one of the paramount issues that Alberta faces today, not only because of the ongoing influx of new Canadians and new Albertans over many, many years but also now the economic downturn that has threatened thousands of people in their stability and their homes.

The housing review committee act proposes to create a mandate to prepare a report on accessibility and affordability and to make recommendations to the minister within nine months. I guess part of the concern is that those of us who have been around for a while have seen this story repeatedly unfold and, along with the government, who was formerly in the opposition, harangued the last government. To his credit, Ed Stelmach was a very staunch supporter of affordable housing and did a lot up until four years ago, and nothing much has happened since. A lot of good investment, a lot of recognition that the corporate sector has to be there, federal and municipal governments have to be there – municipal governments, of course, depend on what the provincial government is allowing and enabling them to do. Not least is recognizing some of the issues that the big cities face disproportionately to the rest of the province, but I think rural areas and smaller urban communities have similar problems.

I guess from the outside it appears that we're delaying something that we have all kinds of research, all kinds of information on for Alberta and all kinds of recognition that what's really needed is action. One of the most creative options that I've seen is coming out of Vancouver, where they have a similar, very hot market, very expensive, and the nonprofit organizations have taken over both public land and public buildings that are not being maintained or developed because the government of the day doesn't have the money. The nonprofit organizations can take the land and leverage it for loans and leverage the properties that need massive amounts of refurbishment, and they can actually get on with the job.

I don't think it should take nine months. I don't think it should take a committee to decide what we need to do here. I think many of us are anxious to see action, not more talk and more research, when we already know so much about Alberta.

Having said that, I hasten to add that there's no question that this is an important issue for this government to address. If they don't feel confident in their research, if they don't feel confident in what we already know about this province and the economic uncertainties or they don't have the will to borrow more money, then encourage municipal and even provincial buildings and lands to be transferred to those that can do it. There are tremendous examples across the country that we could learn from and that we could move on rather than delaying for nine months. There's a critical need.

I share the Member for Edmonton-Centre's concerns that every day or at least every week I have one member of the public or a family contact me about getting help to get into some kind of affordable dwelling or protecting them in the dwelling where they are because they're about to be evicted. They don't have the funding or they've lost some income, and they don't know where to go.

There are seven housing associations across the province that have been addressing this issue for the last 10 years. They have a plan in place, and somehow – I think they're as puzzled as the rest that we haven't gotten on with some of the great planning and opportunities that have been presented to the various levels of government in Alberta. They know what needs to be done in conjunction with – what is it called in Calgary? – the housing board. They have made plans over the last decade. The Resolve campaign is a combination of nine organizations that has gotten all kinds of great plans in place, ready to go, some of them shovel-ready. We presented one of those to the minister last week. The Alberta

Interagency Council on Homelessness: that's the body that has been planning these developments across the province for years and has many of them ready to go. I guess I'm concerned.

4:30

I understand that we're in a budgetary crunch, but there are options. If this government doesn't want to go into further debt to try and facilitate more of this, then ensure that we get on with the job by empowering municipalities and, indeed, transferring some of their own land and some of their own properties to the nonprofit organizations that have proven themselves, groups like Trinity foundation, Silvera, the Calgary housing corporation, a comparable one up here in Edmonton. They simply need to be able to leverage money, leverage properties, and borrow themselves, and they can do it in some cases as efficiently or more efficiently than the government can.

So if I were to make one amendment, I would say that if you're going to set up a committee, have them report in three months, not nine months. Let's make sure we get on with the job and start solving some of the problems here.

Thanks, Madam Speaker.

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

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today in support of this bill, and I want to thank the Member for Calgary-East for bringing it forward. As you know, I recently had the distinct honour and privilege of delivering my maiden speech in this Chamber. In it I spoke about the many great things that make up my constituency of Calgary-Cross and the many reasons why I'm so very proud to represent it. I also related to you about the journey to find my home in this beautiful province.

However, today I rise to tell you about the challenges that the constituents of Calgary-Cross face, and that is the issue of affordable housing. Madam Speaker, thousands of Albertan families have an extremely difficult time finding affordable housing. There are many heartbreaking stories of struggle and perseverance to find a simple and most basic dignity of having a roof over your head. While there are thousands of families facing this struggle, I want to tell you about one particular family in Calgary-Cross. Kerry and Randy have a family of nine, and over the past five years this family has faced homelessness a total of three times. Three times they have faced homelessness, and recently they would have faced homelessness a fourth time; however, they were lucky enough to apply to Habitat for Humanity and were actually accepted into the program. They learned that they would be facing homelessness when their current landlord told them they were going to sell their home. In the face of, actually, the prospect of being without a home again, we now have this family who has found new hope and new dignity and new purpose.

As you know, Habitat for Humanity is a wonderful organization that empowers families by providing home ownership through the use of volunteer labour and donations of money and materials to build a safe, affordable house. Habitat homes are then sold to partner families with no down payment, a no-interest mortgage. The mortgage payments are then put into a revolving fund, which is then used to build even more homes for more families.

I am proud to tell you that I was actually at a ceremony when the first shovels hit the ground and can report that in just a few short months the projects are near completion for the first units. I want to take the opportunity as well to thank the Member for Calgary-Shaw, who, along with many constituency assistants from Calgary, dedicated a day and volunteered their time to build this family a home. So I thank them for that.

Madam Speaker, Kerry and Randy are good, hard-working people. Randy is an active volunteer with Inn from the Cold and organizes an annual Christmas toy drive. His eldest daughter is also an active member of the community and actually volunteered to distribute food during the 2013 Alberta floods. By all accounts they are a model Alberta family, yet like I mentioned, three times they've faced homelessness. This is the problem we're talking about today.

I want to reiterate my sincere thanks to the member for bringing this very important issue forward for us to have a discussion, for us to begin the consultation process that is necessary in order to reach the decisions that are best going to address the issues for the people of this province. We all know that stable housing makes better families, better families make more vibrant communities, and vibrant communities make this province better. It's a very simple formula. Every Albertan needs a safe place to call home. The concept of housing security shows us that when individuals have the personal security of a safe place to live, other challenges in their life become easier to confront, to manage, whether it's health challenges or employment, education, or addictions.

Overall what this member's bill is proposing to do is to strike a committee that is going to look at issues in question and come back with recommendations. Now, I have heard many times the members of the Official Opposition express their concerns about consultation in this province, and here we are talking about not necessarily wanting to do that same process. So it's kind of confusing to me. I do look forward, however, to the day when we come to this Chamber and are talking about social issues and we actually hear something from that side that actually supports those kinds of issues.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that this is the kind of issue that I and many members of this government ran on as a priority of the issues that they were talking to their constituents about at their doorsteps.

In closing, I want to again invite all of you to vote in favour of this bill and to support it going forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, followed by the hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to start by saying that I absolutely agree with and support the goal of this bill and what it's trying to do in increasing access to affordable housing for all Albertans. There have been some very impassioned speeches here by the members previous, not the least of which came from the Minister of Culture and Tourism. I have a tremendous amount of empathy for anyone who finds themselves in that situation.

What I'd like to focus on in my comments here are solutions. How do we solve those problems? They're tremendous challenges still in our province, perhaps not as acute as they were as recently as a year ago but still a serious, serious problem in this province, that we do need to address and to address with some urgency.

I'd like to pick up on some of the solutions offered by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, which I think are very compelling solutions. There are a lot of things that we can do. One of the things the province can do is to increase the stock of affordable housing available in this province by providing dedicated and sustainable funding to a variety of agencies. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View referenced the Resolve campaign in Calgary, and there are many other groups like that. There is a seven-city group that's gotten together to tackle their various 10-year plans to end homelessness. Each are in various states of progress. All of them need that final push over the top. I

would suggest that this government providing substantial capital funding to affordable housing in this province would certainly be welcomed from this part of this side of the House, I can assure you, perhaps even if we need to borrow some money to do that. I think that would be a good use of those dollars.

We need different types of housing in this province. We need single units. We need multifamily units, townhouses. We need permanent supportive living. People need a path through the housing chain, be that rental accommodation or eventually, hopefully, as in the case referenced by the Minister of Culture and Tourism, to ultimately perhaps even own their own home as well. That's a goal of many, many Albertans.

Another option in terms of the solution is rent supports to ensure that rental costs do not exceed 30 per cent of income. I was having a good conversation with the Member for Red Deer-South about some of the challenges of food security for kids in school, kids going hungry. An inability to pay for both rent and food is a very real problem for many Albertans.

4:40

Fortunately, there are agencies like Horizon Housing, and I'm absolutely thrilled and proud to have Horizon Housing facilities in the constituency of Calgary-Elbow. They do tremendous work. They are part of that Resolve campaign, and they are in the process of building another remarkable development in Calgary-Elbow as well as the work they do elsewhere, which will help ensure that people do not find themselves in that situation. That's really important.

What this bill does is that it creates a committee to sit and talk about these things. What we don't need is more talk; we need more action. And while I have a tremendous amount of respect for the member for bringing forward the idea and focusing on housing, what I'd much rather see, rather than simply a committee to talk about these things, is action. I want to see action to support the 10-year plan to end homelessness. I want to see capital funding to increase the affordable housing stock.

I think there are opportunities that are nonfinancial for this government to remove barriers to information sharing between agencies that deal with people struggling with homelessness or on the verge of homelessness. There are many wonderful agencies in this province, but often they're working at crosspurposes, where people find themselves shuffled from agency to agency, where very often provincial tax dollars are spent in multiple silos, ostensibly trying to achieve the same thing but often working at crosspurposes. That will not only not cost the government more money; in fact, there's an opportunity perhaps to save money while at the same time then improving outcomes. These are all options. These are things the government can do right now without another report.

I want to be very clear. In my consultations and discussions with stakeholders my understanding is that a report not unlike the one contemplated by this bill is, in fact, either in progress or has been completed and submitted to the minister. So I believe that there has already been a very substantial consultation recently completed by the ministry of housing. Now, I know that the timelines on private members' bills are long, and I'm not sure if the member was aware of that report. But it's my understanding from multiple stakeholders that, in fact, this exact sort of report, perhaps even more wide ranging, has already been done. If that's the case, wonderful. That's great. That's good. Let's let the minister receive that report, let's see what it says, and I will absolutely and enthusiastically support this government taking action to increase the stock of affordable housing in this province.

Now, one of the other aspects of this bill that I do find troubling is any contemplation of rent controls. There has been, certainly, some discussion here in this House today about the challenges of rent control. Of course, I've done some research. I have a concern that even raising the idea of rent controls greatly elevated the blood pressure of many a landlord around the province although it may seem on the surface that it has beneficial effect. One would think: "Well, isn't this great? We'll reduce or constrain rental increases, and that will have a beneficial effect." On the surface I'm sure some would believe that.

But the Calgary Action Committee on Housing and Homelessness has created a document called rent control, perception versus reality, which I'll be happy to table tomorrow at the appropriate time. It finds that rent controls often erode the quality of controlled units, at the same time driving up costs for all other rental housing. It creates closed communities, reducing the turnover in rental markets. Now, why would reducing the turnover in rental markets be a bad thing? What it actually does is that it creates these closed rental communities, having an impact where perhaps black markets can develop and, ultimately, creating a housing shortage. That's not what we're trying to do here. In fact, we're trying to do the opposite.

What we can do in this province and what has worked well is that we allow the market to do its job. Now, the government has a big role to play in ensuring the stock of affordable housing is there, but it doesn't prevent people from moving through the housing chain. It doesn't disincent people from making an investment in rental accommodation even as a small entrepreneur.

Now, I want to be clear on this upcoming comment that I don't want the Minister of Culture and Tourism to take this as a sharp criticism of his example because I'm really encouraged and inspired by any story of a family who has found their way into permanent housing, and Habitat for Humanity is a remarkable organization. But the example he used was that they were in the situation where their landlord was selling the property. That's something that as a landlord you have the right to do. You have the right to dispose of your asset at any time. There are rules, of course, in terms of timeline, of notice, and that sort of thing. Now, I don't want in any way to diminish the experience that that family was going through and what it meant for them. I know that in their case that meant that they were facing homelessness, and that is the opposite of trivial. In fact, it's a very, very serious situation for a family that's faced that previously.

But I want to be careful that in talking about this bill, we don't create a situation where landlords or entrepreneurs feel like there may be a risk, a bigger risk, in investing in a rental property, which would reduce the stock of rental accommodation available in the province, which would exacerbate the problem that we're all here trying to solve. So I think we want to be very careful about that.

I just want to highlight a couple of other structural issues that I have with the bill.

I agree with the Member for Calgary-Mountain View that the nine-month time frame, if this bill does go ahead, is probably too long.

I've already talked about my concern about rent regulation, rent controls.

Section 3(2) says, "The report must include, but is not limited to, a review of" the five things listed. In section 4 it enumerates four stakeholder groups but does not use the wording "including but not limited to," which by the definition means that the only people that could be consulted would be landlords, tenants, home builders, housing organizations. That would mean that if someone perhaps

was contemplating becoming a landlord, they're not able to contribute.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 202, and I want to just indicate that I believe that the provision of affordable housing to all Albertans is a critical responsibility of all of us and that I believe that in our own ways everyone in this Assembly would like to aspire to that goal. The question is, you know, how to go about it.

Let me take some of the comments that I've heard from our friends in the Wildrose Official Opposition. The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo apparently has difficulty distinguishing between a private member's bill and a government bill because he repeatedly referred to what the government is doing with respect to this, and I just want to indicate to him that this is a private member's bill that is put forward by a member of the government caucus and not a government bill.

I think that's significant in a number of ways because government bills can take direct action, but private members' bills are often constrained. I've had considerable experience drafting private members' bills, and I know that there are limitations that have to be there that are brought to our attention by Parliamentary Counsel. One of the most common forms of a private member's bill that wants to move in a certain direction is on the advice of counsel formatted in this particular way; that is to say, to strike a committee to move in a certain direction. That's very common, and that is one of the limitations, I think, on private members' bills that I've experienced. So the suggestion that this private member's bill would be holding up government action in key areas for nine months, I think, is not necessarily the case.

Now, both Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and Airdrie went on and on about consultation, and I find that really difficult to fathom since the bill is precisely about consultation. Now, a private member doesn't have the resources of government to do the consultation to the same extent that the government could do, but I think that it's pretty clear that this is a bill about talking to stakeholders. It specifies four major groups, including landlords, tenants, home builders, and housing organizations, all of which will be consulted. There will be, in fact, public meetings. Section 4 of the private member's bill talks about public meetings that would be held. All of these things are envisaged by the bill, so to do a whole bunch of consultation so you can pass a bill to implement consultation strikes me as a bit ridiculous.

4:50

Now, the Official Opposition has made a great to-do about rent controls, and I think the minister – the statement that they've quoted by the minister of economic development, that the government is not considering rent controls at this time, is a definitive statement of where this government is at. Rent controls are one of many tools that have been used by governments, including the former PC government. At one point it brought in rent controls. That doesn't mean that they're the best tool or the most desirable tool or a tool that is available or is particularly useful at all times.

Quite frankly, I think that the key here is to increase the supply of housing, particularly the affordable housing, and to let the market work. That is, in fact, I think you'll find, where the government is focused, and I think members should stay tuned, going forward in the next couple of weeks, for some news with respect to that particular direction. I believe that we need to make sure that every family, every individual has at least some basic, secure housing and

that there's a responsibility, when the market doesn't work, for the government to play a role. That doesn't necessarily mean or usually mean rent controls.

The Official Opposition is trying to spin this in a way to frighten off investment, and I think that that's shameful. I think that it doesn't represent what's needed in the market – this is my personal opinion – and doesn't recognize the reality today and is not what's needed in the current situation. I want to indicate to hon. members that I think this bill is a good bill. It sets a clear direction for the House. It will not interfere with the government taking action in a more immediate sense, but I think that it's a worthwhile thing to do, to have that consultation, to continue to focus the efforts of all of us on making sure that every Albertan has a decent, safe place to go to when they come home at night. I think that that's the goal of this bill.

I think it's really quite despicable how the Wildrose opposition is trying to portray and spin this bill as something nefarious, something that is not going to help people, because it will help people, Madam Speaker. It will generate public awareness. It will give policy options to the government, not all of which have to come from the bureaucracy. There are lots of great ideas out there, and I think that anything we can do – anything we can do – to reach out and invite new ideas to solve these problems is welcome. I think hon. members should support this bill because I think it advances the cause of housing and of ending homelessness, making sure that everyone has a secure place to live.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon in the few minutes that we have left together to just provide some very brief comments about the bill before us. Let me be clear. Myself and the other members – I wouldn't speak for everyone, but certainly the members who've spoken today firmly believe in providing affordable housing if done in a way that increases access, and the hon. members for Airdrie and Fort McMurray both share that desire. Certainly, members of the Official Opposition have a desire to ensure that there is affordable housing in the marketplace.

Earlier today I rose to highlight this concern, that in the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, in Olds, Didsbury, and Carstairs there are 20 affordable housing units available. In the community of Olds there are eight of the 20, and only two of those eight are currently inhabitable, and there is a waiting list of five to have access to those units. Madam Speaker, what those five individuals are calling out for is access to affordable housing. They didn't call up my office and say: please stand and vote for a piece of legislation that's going to study something that's been studied on numerous occasions, and nine months from now put that study on the shelf and don't do anything with it, just like the last number of studies that have been done. What are those five people on the waiting list in the community of Olds hoping for? They're hoping for action, just like – we heard the minister of tourism speak about people who are pulling themselves up out of homelessness through wonderful organizations.

What we need is more affordable housing in the marketplace. We need housing providers that are willing to invest in their community by purchasing homes and then providing them to others for rent. We have seen study after study. We have seen this government call for studies. If this is going to be a priority of the government – in fact, I hope that it is – they will take the necessary steps to go ahead

and ensure that this information can be realized. But more important than the study is action.

The government would like to say: “Oh, the opposition doesn’t support access to affordable housing. Well, the opposition doesn’t care about issues around social housing, affordable housing, seniors’ housing.” While they would like to make these wild and outlandish claims, what the opposition wants to see is a commitment to ensuring action on these items. The people in Olds want action. The people who are waiting for access to affordable housing want action, and that’s exactly what we would like to see on this side of the House. Affordable housing is of critical importance. If families don’t have access to housing, which is so important to the future success of those families, that creates such uncertainty in the home. Children underperform. Relationships are strained at the thought of being homeless.

What we don’t need is more inaction. What we don’t need is more studies. What we don’t need is significant housing providers and stakeholders coming, as I know – I have taken phone calls that have raised significant concerns. While I appreciate the Government House Leader’s commitment to not utilizing rent controls, the challenge with that statement, Madam Speaker, is that it went like this: the government is committed to not using rent controls at this time. So there is this uncertainty that is created amongst housing providers.

The Government House Leader likes to make accusations about the opposition’s desires, the opposition’s perceived role in affordable housing.

We’ve seen members like the Member for Medicine Hat work closely with the community of Medicine Hat to ensure that homelessness doesn’t exist in that community. Let me tell you, Madam Speaker, that Medicine Hat should be congratulated. The housing community and the partner organizations in Medicine Hat should be upheld. What that community didn’t need was another study. That community rallied around a cause.

As much as a study is nice, action by the government is exponentially better. Unfortunately, that’s not what we see. I know that members on this side of the Assembly are committed to ensuring access to affordable housing, are committed to supporting our seniors . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but we’re at 5 o’clock. We’ve run out of time to close debate. We need to move on to the next order of business.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Energy Sector Jobs

502. Mr. Rosendahl moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to engage with energy sector workers when developing strategies to diversify Alberta’s energy sector and create value-added jobs.

Mr. Rosendahl: Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise today and speak to the issue of government engaging with workers when developing strategies that diversify Alberta’s energy sector and create value-added jobs. On behalf of my constituents of West Yellowhead, many of whom derive their livelihoods from the energy sector, and the countless Albertans I’ve spoken to who work in and are affected by the energy sector, it is my privilege to debate this motion today.

When we’re talking energy sector, we also include forestry and coal. We also must include the spinoff jobs that these industries create, whether it’s a single welder or whether it is a company that’s providing plant turnaround maintenance. These workers are also affected by this.

Madam Speaker, as our province endures the current economic challenges due to the drop in the global prices of oil – and we must add coal to that – it has become more apparent than ever that we must invest in economic diversification to ensure that Albertans are not casualties in what has become a boom-and-bust economy. All we have to do is look at the town of Grande Cache when we’re talking about this because it’s happened to them before.

No one will hear me argue against the notion that Alberta is an energy province. As I engage with my constituents in West Yellowhead, I am reminded every day of the role the resource sector plays in the lives of Albertans and the role our resources have in creating a fair and strong economy. We are and we will continue to be an energy province. Regardless of what some may say, we are proud of Alberta’s natural resources and understand the critical role these resources have in our economy.

Madam Speaker, diversification in the energy sector is essential for Albertans so that our province’s economy becomes resilient to the changes in the energy and coal prices. It is our duty as members of this Legislature to ensure that our province captures the full value of our resources. This also includes forestry. In doing so, it is essential that our government engage with resource sector workers when developing new strategies. Listening to workers and industrial leaders must remain at the forefront of the government’s agenda. By doing so, Albertans can be confident that we will be on the right path towards diversifying our economy and creating good, value-added jobs. I am proud to be part of a government that values the input and ideas of energy workers, and we are committed to supporting them in a variety of ways, especially in such difficult economic times. The fact of the matter is that front-line workers understand the challenges the energy sector faces, and our government respects their role and opinions.

Today’s unique economic challenges should remind us of the importance of economic diversification. It also serves as a reminder that economic diversification requires a multipronged approach that includes looking at new areas of opportunity while finding opportunities to build on our current areas of strength. Through this motion it is my goal to ensure that Albertans working in the energy sector remain in the energy sector regardless of the price of energy. Alberta’s resource sector remains a key driver of the provincial economy. If we want to create long-term, sustainable jobs, we need to diversify beyond just energy extraction into other areas of strength. But, again, we must engage with our community workers and stakeholders.

During the March 8 Speech from the Throne the government identified that it would establish the energy diversification advisory committee, which will provide advice on the steps needed to build a more diversified and resilient economy. As plans develop, I certainly urge the committee to engage with the various organizations that represent resource sector workers. Madam Speaker, my constituency of West Yellowhead has many organizations and energy sector workers who would be interested in sharing their input and ideas, and I’m more than happy to collaborate with the committee to ensure my constituents are being heard. This is vital.

During our current session the minister of economic development introduced the Promoting Job Creation and Diversification Act. This will assist entrepreneurs and businesses to create new jobs and growth, which will become increasingly necessary during difficult

economic times. Madam Speaker, I am proud to be part of a government proactively working to support a diversified economy.

The fact of the matter is that Albertans are tired of these boom-and-bust cycles. Previous governments may have been content with having the province's economy depend on a single commodity and on a single market. Our government is taking a different approach. Our government is working towards a future where our resources hold full value. Our government is striving towards a prosperous future for today and for our children. Let me remind everyone: all Albertans deserve to benefit from their province's resources. This is the true Alberta advantage. Our government will not sacrifice long-term recovery for short-term benefit. Diversification within the energy sector is central to long-term recovery.

One of the four objectives of the royalty review advisory panel was to identify ways to encourage diversification opportunities such as value-added processing, innovation, or other forms of investment in Alberta. On January 29, 2016, the government of Alberta accepted all of the royalty review advisory panel's recommendations, including the fourth recommendation, to seize opportunities to enhance value-added processing.

Madam Speaker, on February 1, 2016, as part of the government's continued action on the economy to help create jobs, attract investment, and diversify Alberta's economy, the government announced the petrochemical diversification program, which will encourage companies to invest in the development of new Alberta petrochemical facilities by providing up to \$500 million in incentives through royalty credits. The benefits of this program are significant to Alberta workers and their families: between \$3 billion and \$5 billion worth of investment attracted to Alberta, up to 3,000 new jobs during construction of new petrochemical facilities, and more than 1,000 jobs once the operation begins. Madam Speaker, this program will attract investment and create necessary jobs in Alberta. I'm proud to say that the program came as a direct result of industry leaders' input. More than ever our government remains committed to engage leaders in the energy sector.

5:10

As part of the government's long-term climate change strategy the government is committed to phase out coal-generated energy by 2030. In my constituency coal mining has become integral to the local economy. Through this motion I urge the government to focus on public outreach with energy workers and coal industry leaders to ensure that West Yellowhead and all impacted communities in Alberta are engaged in this process. I have heard concerns from those in my riding about the future outlook of the coal mining industry, but the fact is that reducing fossil fuel emissions is central to a climate leadership plan, which will create more jobs and diversify our economy. Our opposition seems to think that it's okay for Alberta to ignore the realities of climate change, but this government is not willing to follow the same approach.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to speak about Motion 502. I was one of those proud energy sector workers till recently. I don't understand why this government deems it necessary to waste this House's time and money. We are paid very well for the job we do or, at least, the job we are supposed to do. Taxpayers are paying for us to create and debate legislation that could better Alberta. Instead, the Member for West Yellowhead thinks it is important to create legislation that wastes everyone's time.

[The Speaker in the chair]

My first question to the member is whether or not he considered the energy sector workers before submitting this motion. In fact, did the member consider anyone before creating this motion? The irony of the situation would be quite hilarious if the member on the backbench decided to create a motion that convinced the front bench to consult when he himself didn't consult. Now, if the member did consult energy sector workers before creating this motion, then what is the point of this motion? If the member could already consult energy sector workers, then there is no need for a motion to tell people to consult energy sector workers.

Seriously, why is the member wasting our time with a piece of legislation that should be a normal part of anyone's job? That's our job. Our job is not to make decisions just based on our own ideas. Our job is to consult with Albertans and create legislation that they deem is important, necessary, and useful. The only way this piece of legislation could be any more wasteful is if we took some scissors to the bill and made it say: be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly ask the government to engage with Albertans before creating the legislation.

An Hon. Member: It's not legislation; it's a motion.

Mr. Panda: Okay. I hear you. Actually, I take back what I said.

That would be a far more useful piece of legislation since this government cannot seem to consult with Albertans before creating legislation. [interjection] Yeah. I'm coming to that. This motion is a perfect example of why this type of legislation is needed. I'm coming to your point. [interjection] You know what? This is probably the most important piece of legislation this government has brought to the table so far. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Panda: I apologize for what I said earlier.

The Member for West Yellowhead has hit the nail on the head as to what this government needs. This government needs legislation that commands them to consult with Albertans. Albertans have been begging to be consulted with. Mr. Speaker, Albertans have been begging to be consulted with. The Member for West Yellowhead is probably more in tune with Albertans compared to any of his fellow NDP MLAs, who are making fun of energy sector workers. I'm sure the Member for West Yellowhead saw the outrage Albertans showed when they were not consulted during Bill 6. If we'd had this motion before, maybe the ministers would have applied the spirit of this motion to their legislation and consulted with farmers. Unfortunately, they did not consult, and instead we had protest after protest here at the Legislature asking this government to consult with them. The pain this government put itself through trying to calm the masses after they put forward Bill 6 without consulting Albertans could have been prevented.

If only the Member for West Yellowhead had put this motion through sooner. There are many Albertans who would have benefited from this motion being passed sooner, and I would like to read some quotes from Albertans who wanted this government to consult with them.

With regard to Bill 6 Shandele Battle said: it would be implemented January 1, and then where's our voice; for me, that's not democracy; that's dictatorship.

Also on Bill 6 County Councillor Bill Velichko said: that's my problem with the NDP right now; they just throw anything in without doing a study on it.

On Bill 8 the Calgary board of education published a release saying, "We are also concerned that Boards have not had a chance to discuss the Bill with the minister."

On the menthol ban the Western Convenience Stores Association issued a release quoting the association president, Andrew Klukas: "All we wanted was a chance to speak to this government about the impact of their decision . . . We were denied that chance."

An Hon. Member: To continue poisoning.

Mr. Panda: That's the record of your government.

On the climate leadership plan the *Financial Post* ran an article with the following statement: "Imperial Oil Ltd. chairman and CEO Rich Kruger, and MEG Energy Corp. president and CEO Bill McCaffrey, were not consulted and are reportedly outraged by the secret deal."

I'm saddened that Albertans had to ask so many times before this government consulted them. I'm saddened that this government could not consult with Albertans without taxpayers' money being spent on this motion, which reiterates the job description of an MLA. But, in the end, I'm glad that someone from the NDP government saw what the rest of Alberta saw. I'm glad that the member from the backbench saw that his front bench was not consulting Albertans and decided to do something about that. I'm glad that this motion was put forward. This government needs to understand that consulting with Albertans is of utmost importance.

I encourage every single MLA here, especially every minister on the front bench, to vote in favour of this motion. More consultation is needed, and this motion is a step in the right direction. A lot of money has been spent creating this motion when you consider all the staff involved. I really hope this is the last time we need a piece of legislation directing the ministers to do their job since every additional piece costs taxpayers more and more money. Hopefully, this motion is enough, and we don't need a separate motion directing every minister separately to consult on every issue individually.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

5:20

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll start by correcting the previous speaker in that this is a motion, not a bill. Motions are the rights of individual members of the Assembly to represent their own constituents but also to act in the best interests of their constituents and all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Motion 502. Quite frankly, there's no minimizing the impact that the collapse in global oil prices is having on our workers in the energy sector, but while Alberta's economy has experienced a major setback, I know that this is something that we can and will recover from because as Albertans we've always not only seen the challenges that we've faced but also the opportunities in those challenges. It's clear that Albertans need an economy that is resilient to energy swings, captures the full value of our resources, and offers prosperous futures for our children.

To do this, we have set out a strong economic/jobs plan that includes investing in much-needed infrastructure to build schools, hospitals, roads, and bridges, that Albertans rely on; supporting the private sector in creating jobs; improving access to capital for entrepreneurs; encouraging innovation across a variety of sectors; and increasing access to markets for Alberta's products and services. This spring we saw the introduction of the new Promoting Job Creation and Diversification Act, which will give the government additional tools to carry out this plan. In order for government to be successful in carrying out this plan, we need

strong partners. That's why we're seizing this opportunity to work with and invest in our workers.

Earlier this year, Mr. Speaker, we announced that the Alberta government will provide up to \$500 million in royalty credits to our petrochemicals industry. This program builds on the strengths of our energy industry and our skilled workers and will attract new investment into Alberta. It will capitalize on growing global demand for petrochemical products like plastics and textiles. We shouldn't just be shipping our raw resources out of the province. We should be processing them here and keeping the jobs here at home. This program will attract between \$3 billion and \$5 billion worth of investment. New facilities will generate thousands of jobs from construction through to operation. Additional benefits will flow to the manufacturing, transportation, and business sector services.

Mr. Speaker, the royalty review panel's report urged the government to accelerate the development and commercialization of partial upgrading and value-creation technologies for bitumen. The petrochemical diversification program was the first step in that direction.

Mr. Speaker, as part of our government's commitment to phase out coal-generated energy by 2030 and transition to cleaner sources of electricity, our government made a commitment to work with affected workers to support their long-term economic sustainability through this transition. We will be investing in new technologies, better efficiency, and new job-creating investments in green infrastructure. This transition will be good for our health, good for our environment, and be economically sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few examples of how the government is engaging with energy-sector workers to build a stronger, more resilient, and diversified economy defined by high employment, a strong workforce, and healthy enterprises, and I commend the Member for West Yellowhead for bringing forward this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for West Yellowhead for bringing this to our attention. I would hope everyone in this House has as much regard for the energy workers in this province as I do, and as the Energy shadow minister over the last year my immense respect for this industry has just grown. But I have to say that the motion is shallow, and it's another example of the NDP taking time out of the House with job descriptions.

Across the way they have mentioned that motions are for members to say what's needed in their constituency, and I completely agree. That's wonderful. However, what we're trying to find out here, I guess, is what the ministers' jobs are. So going forward from there, Albertans need leadership, Mr. Speaker, and instead the province's leaders are going to spend the next hour debating a proposal to remind the ministers of what their job is. As the Official Opposition we're a little baffled as to why the NDP feel they need to get House approval on something that is so implicit in governing. This is so far beyond common-sense policy. We have a minister that is currently pushing his mandate letter through the House, Bill 1, and now we have members of the NDP's own backbench putting up motions to remind their ministers that they should be consulting before they push through legislation. It's unbelievable.

The government still doesn't get it that Albertans expect consultation from their government. This is not a concept that should even be up for consideration. Consultation is not a debatable

entity, yet here we are debating the need to consult. Should Albertans be concerned that any time there's legislation that doesn't include specific recommendations to consult, the government will feel the need not to? What has the government been doing for the last 10 months if not meeting with groups in the energy sector, workers, as their industry takes the worst beating that we have seen in a generation?

Mr. Speaker, you would have thought that after the massive, province-wide Bill 6 rallies, motivated in large part by the failure to consult on the part of this government, those over there would get the importance of meaningful consultation. It is not just a few reps at the top but all the way through the sector. Congratulations – congratulations – to the NDP backbench on figuring out that consultation is important. That's fantastic. At least some members of the NDP seem to understand what the thousands upon thousands of protestors were trying to tell this government during the numerous Bill 6 rallies. It's a little more than disheartening to see that even the NDP's own MLAs feel that the cabinet ministers still don't understand and that this requires further action and that this has to happen in a motion.

I want to break down this motion for the members of the House, and I will try to be as eloquent as the Member for West Yellowhead. The motion reads: the members of this House ought to “urge the government to engage with energy sector workers when developing strategies to diversify Alberta's energy sector and create value-added jobs.” Yes. I agree completely.

It is difficult to know even where to begin. This might be the reason that we're struggling to understand what this government is trying to do. Over in the Wildrose our entire party is structured around the requirement to consult with people. We advocate for grassroots governance. We utilize the knowledge of everyday Albertans when crafting our ideas. Consultation is so essential to the soul of our party that it never dawned on us that our new government, who saw how out of touch the old one was, would need a reminder of this.

Mr. Speaker, the most ironic part of this is that the motion then goes on to address the notion of government-driven economic diversification. How could you possibly expect to centrally plan economic activity without first consulting Albertans? Governments, especially those bent on central planning like this one, suffer from information asymmetry. Unlike the free market, where thousands of commercial exchanges provide the information necessary to define the relationship between goods supplied and goods demanded, this government strives to be the sole arbiter of what Alberta will supply and what the world will demand.

It seems that on their climate plan they only consulted a handful of oil executives, but here they are acknowledging workers, and that's fantastic. Thank you again to the member. It's important. But I'd like to note another group, the small and medium-sized energy businesses, who are so vital to the exact innovation that you're looking for and the job creation in our primary economic sector. Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely imperative that this government not only talk to the workers who have experience on the ground and a few top execs at multinationals but that they engage with those who run the thousands of smaller businesses and contractors because they actually will have the insights not only into what might work but what will also distort the marketplace and hurt others with the unintended consequences.

Over the next three years this government will be in negotiation with industry representatives that have infinitely more knowledge than all of the members in this House in their field. This is not something that anybody needs to be offended by. It's an implicit reality. They are the experts in their fields, Mr. Speaker. Even with the diversity we have here, there are so many professionals that are

not adequately represented, and this House alone does not have all the answers.

5:30

Alberta has an immense wealth of knowledge capital, and our people are well educated, they're entrepreneurial, and they're innovative. We should be relying on Albertans to tell us what the barriers are, and the government could responsibly move to spur new investment based on that information. That's where the consultation must come in. There is an undeniable arrogance seeping out of any government that does not understand that one of the greatest values a democracy has is the ability to download decision-making authority by designing our political process to be responsive to the demands of the people who put us here.

The Wildrose has been very clear and firm with this government that jobs need to be its primary priority. I was proud to stand beside our leader, the Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin, when he released and we released our Wildrose jobs action plan to much critical acclaim. Mr. Speaker, government-driven economic diversification is not a guaranteed path to job creation. A few weeks ago now I chose to rise in this House and use my response to the throne speech to detail for you some of the history of the government-backed economic diversification in the province of Alberta. I outlined for you numerous failures that previous governments embarked upon.

Now, maybe the government at this point didn't feel the need to listen to the Official Opposition that day, so let me be clear again. Corporate welfare is not a guaranteed job creator, and if you don't consult widely, as the Member for West Yellowhead has so eloquently said, you will surely do more harm than good. With the growing number of job losses, Alberta's tax base is shrinking. This government needs to be certain that the returns promised on a government investment aiming to diversify Alberta's economy exceed the tax burden that it creates. We still haven't seen this government define what diversification means. We still don't have a well-thought-out plan for development.

It is time to govern. Where are the concrete plans? Why hasn't the government presented a detailed vision for diversification? We're talking about diversifying petrochemicals, yes? But beyond some certain business grants to certain businesses, I haven't seen a plan. There are so many opportunities in this province of Alberta, and as the shadow minister for Energy I have in the last 10 months had the pleasure of meeting with numerous workers and executives in the petrochemical sector.

Mr. Speaker, I will of course support this motion, and, yes, this government absolutely – absolutely – needs to do more consultation. I'm just completely baffled by the necessity to state it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise and speak to the hon. member's motion. I also would like to thank the Official Opposition for reminding us at length about this motion being such a time-waster. For many Albertans, especially those who work in the energy sector either directly or indirectly, this is a stressful and frustrating time. We all hear and see the stories daily, the strain of job losses and the pressures that are put on hard-working families. While we cannot control the global price of oil or natural gas, we can control how we react to it. I believe that our government is taking strong and balanced action that will provide the industry with new tools and policies to add value to our resources, diversify our markets, and create good jobs.

Please allow me a few minutes to outline some of the actions our energy workers have either been involved in or will benefit from. As previously mentioned by our minister of economic development, our government has announced a new petrochemicals diversification program that will attract investment, create jobs, and provide long-term benefits to Albertans. This program will encourage companies to invest in the development of new petrochemical facilities in Alberta through royalty credits totalling up to \$500 million. It's expected that these credits will leverage \$5 billion in new investment. This investment is investment that otherwise would have gone to the U.S. Gulf coast. In fact, we have heard first-hand from industry that projects they were considering and planning for Louisiana are now being rethought in favour of Alberta, all because of this diversification program.

Projects will be selected through a competitive application process, with credits awarded only once the approved projects are built and operating. The goal is to support the construction of several facilities using methane or propane as feedstock. These feedstocks are abundant in Alberta, and it's a value that we should be tapping into. This program will result in jobs both in construction and operation of these facilities and can create more demand downstream for their resources. It is expected that it will create 3,000 jobs in construction and 1,000 permanent jobs afterwards.

Recently I did visit several major hubs for petrochemical diversification areas in Alberta such as NOVA Chemicals in Red Deer and Methanex and CF Industries in Medicine Hat. I recognize how important the industry is to Alberta and the potential it has for further growth.

My department also continues to move forward with the implementation of our new modernized royalty framework. The new framework is based off recommendations that we received from industry and from Albertans and through the panel. I'm pleased to inform the Legislature of some of the consultations that went into the report. The panel conducted an open and transparent examination of our royalty system that included direct discussions with industry and Alberta unions that represent thousands of workers. The panel met with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, Alberta Federation of Labour, United Nurses, Building Trades of Alberta, and many, many industries. Additionally, the panel held four public open houses in several cities and conducted telephone town halls across Alberta, reaching thousands of individuals.

Mr. Speaker, our government values the input from these organizations and from these individuals. These are workers who are on the front line of this industry and understand the challenges as well as anyone. In their consultations the royalty review panel found fundamental flaws with the old framework, flaws that were holding Albertans back. The panel found that the old framework was out of date, causing us to lag competitively. It was too rigid for the advances in technology. It was too risky, with built-in uncertainties that deterred investment. It lacked incentives to encourage more efficient and environmentally responsible development, and it lacked transparency to allow Albertans to see for themselves how their royalties were being collected without a plan to diversify our economy.

Albertans can't afford a royalty system that isn't up to the challenges of today, which is why our new framework will encourage all companies to drive down costs, making us more competitive; provide greater certainty for investors; remain adaptable to advancements in technology; support a more efficient and environmentally responsible development; and it will help to diversify our energy economy. Taken as a whole, the modernized framework makes it easier for companies to understand their long-term costs so they can invest with confidence and support jobs in Alberta.

Our support for energy workers does not end here. As part of our recent Speech from the Throne our government was pleased to announce the energy diversification advisory committee. This committee will be made up of a broad representation of Albertans who understand the importance of promoting more value-added industries in our province. While the membership of this committee has not yet been finalized, it will consider the views of energy workers in this province and the importance of their opinions as it reviews opportunities for our province.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, our government continues to support the building of new pipelines. Better market access will support our energy sector and, by extension, energy workers. Our country's inability over the past 10 years to pursue a strategic energy policy that Canadians support has made it impossible for our country to diversify its markets. Canada currently imports almost a million barrels of oil from other countries when there is no need if the proper infrastructure could be built. Canada does not need to finance the economies of other countries when we have the resources to be self-sufficient and support energy and construction jobs in our own country. This is an argument we continue to make publicly and privately with stakeholders at home and across the country. The construction of these pipelines will support energy workers as well.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to bring these facts to the attention of this Legislature, and I am pleased to support energy workers in Alberta. Our government supports them. I thank the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for his motion.

5:40

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

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it would be amusing if it wasn't kind of sad, but here we have one of the government's own backbenchers that wants to urge the front bench over there to do something that any competent government would understand is their daily duty to do; namely, to consult with all stakeholders before it makes major policy changes. But, then, if this socialist government has one undeniable hallmark, it is its utter lack of seeking input from all Albertans before making up its mind on important policy directions. Let's not be fooled by the climate action consultations. The Minister of Energy admitted her staffers were so-called assisting the panel from the very beginning. With so many pressing issues facing our province, from skyrocketing unemployment figures to the plummeting price of oil, Albertans expect us to be here working on the pressing issues of the day and not wasting our time with motions like this, designed to remind us of our most basic duties as legislators.

The worst part about this is that the motion doesn't even meet its own apparent goal. Perhaps the member doesn't understand the true nature of policy consultation. It needs to be very broadly based, and I don't understand why this motion only urges government to engage with energy sector workers, for instance. What about the contractors? What about the independent businessmen and businesswomen, who don't qualify for employment insurance, by the way, and who don't show up in some of our unemployment statistics? And what about the communities, the municipalities like Hanna and Forestburg, whose very existence is now threatened by this government's policies rolled out without consultation in the first eight weeks or nine weeks of this government taking office? Where was that consultation before rolling out a policy? How about the chambers of commerce? The Rotary clubs, who represent the job creators in our province: why aren't they worthy of mention in this motion? They're not worthy of engagement?

Well, we saw the disastrous effects of this government failing to properly consult not that long ago with the botched implementation of Bill 6. The members opposite thought they knew better than the

farmers and ranchers and even their own government experts, who warned them that this bill would create, and I quote, panic amongst farmers and ranchers who were begging, pleading to be consulted with. But the government pushed forward without broad-based consultation, and now we're having round-table discussions after the fact. The government said that it learned its lesson following the Bill 6 debacle, but clearly that is not the case.

Clearly, the government's own backbenchers don't want to go home again to thousands of Albertans who have been ignored on legislation, and sadly I would have to concede that maybe this government needs to be constantly reminded that consultation is critical on policy changes to our most important industry. This comes as second nature to most people, but time and again we've seen this government make some head-scratching decisions with very real consequences for workers and businesses, families, and entire communities with no prior consultation.

No doubt the member putting this motion forward is sharing a sentiment he's heard in his constituency. I realize there are coal miners and plant workers in his constituency who are probably in a state of shock right now that this member over here for West Yellowhead is representing a party that is putting their communities at risk and putting those families out of work. They were never consulted ahead of time, but this government just rolls on anyhow, and people just don't trust this government to diversify the energy sector or properly consult while it seeks to do so and needs a reminder.

Being that this is one of our most important industries – and, frankly, this government has many members who just can't be trusted to act in a way that is fair and reasonable – the list of groups who would be left out of consultation under this motion is quite shocking. Why doesn't this motion urge the government to engage with those who represent consumer groups, for example? Sectors of our economy that use energy like farmers, small-business groups, and, as I mentioned before, chambers of commerce, these small and medium businesses who consume energy to produce products who are also the job creators and the drivers of most innovation and diversification in our province: why are they missing from this motion? Is it because the Member for West Yellowhead and most of the NDP caucus don't have the life experience to see this world and Alberta's economy from multiple perspectives? I'm trying to understand why any member of this House would put forward a motion that states the obvious yet misses so very much; namely, the scope of broad consultation in the development of policy.

Once again we see a motion from the NDP caucus urging the government to do what any competent government should already be doing anyway. It's as unnecessary as Bill 1, which lays out the job description for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. This motion is another kind of job description for a government that doesn't appear to know how to do its job. But I'll tell you what. If the front bench of the NDP caucus really aren't sure what to do and they need legislation and motions like this and Bill 1 to give them job descriptions and tasks on a week-by-week basis, then okay, I guess we'd better help them along and support this motion. Any step towards more consultation is a positive step under this government.

So I am encouraging everyone in this House, especially the ministers across the aisle who need the support and understanding of what their job is, to all support this thing. Maybe once this is done, we won't have to revisit the issue again. Everybody over there will know that you need to consult Albertans before you make policy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to rise today and speak in favour of my colleague's motion about engaging with workers when developing strategies that diversify Alberta's energy sector and create value-added jobs. It's something I engage in daily, as I know our government MLAs and ministers do as well, contrary to the belief over here. On behalf of my constituents of Leduc-Beaumont, many of whom derive their livelihoods from the energy sector, and the countless Albertans I've spoken to who work in and are affected by the energy sector, it is my privilege to stand in this House and speak in favour of this motion today.

As I engage with my constituents in the fantastic constituency of Leduc-Beaumont, I am reminded every day of the role that oil and gas plays in the lives of Albertans and the role our resources have in creating a fair and strong economy. There are approximately 500 oil and gas companies in the Alberta international region, with many in my constituency, and that's just the oil and gas ones. There are also a growing number of renewable companies as well. I've had a number of constituents in my office speaking about the issues they are facing, the troubles they are having after losing their jobs, and being left out of the new EI changes certainly hasn't helped them on this journey. These Albertans aren't looking for a handout; they're just looking for a hand up.

Mr. Speaker, I digress. I've also had some very positive stories of companies diversifying their services. One company I know of had to let go of about 20 people not that long ago, then turned around and hired them back plus more because they knew their company could use the skills that they had to enter into the renewable sector as well as oil and gas, and they are now very well placed to continue to succeed well into the future.

Mr. Speaker, the historical overdependence on a single commodity has made us vulnerable to external factors our government and Albertans are unable to control, but Albertans are resilient. Albertans have shown they are a resilient and entrepreneurial group during this economic challenge. We need to look no further than Leduc and Beaumont to see that.

Albertans want and need a government that stands up for their interests during these economic times. Mr. Speaker, diversification in the energy sector is central for the long-term growth of Alberta's economy, the whole sector. As my colleague stated, it is our duty as members of the Legislature to ensure that our province captures the full value of our resources. Diversification to me means not only moving into and utilizing more green and renewable energy sources to complement and supplement fossil fuels but also realizing the potential of the companies, the technology, and the people we have already to expand into other areas and other markets. It is essential that our government engage with the over 158,000 natural resource workers in Alberta when developing new strategies. Listening to workers and industry leaders must remain at the forefront of this government's agenda.

I was recently at an energy services breakfast, listening to experts and innovators in the energy industry discuss exciting opportunities in their fields, from Columbia to Mexico to India. It was a fantastic and very positive morning, learning not only about new opportunities but also about some of the amazing things already happening here in Alberta. And there are a lot of amazing things that have been happening and continue to happen. As Canadians and Albertans we do a fairly poor job of patting ourselves on the back with that. One of my focuses is to try to get more of that positivity out there and to talk about the things that we already are doing.

5:50

It's not always about reinventing the wheel per se but building on what we already have as well. I'm proud to be part of a government

who is actively seeking the input and the ideas from these energy workers. During these difficult times we remain committed more than ever to supporting those affected by the energy sector. Mr. Speaker, front-line workers have the valuable knowledge and experience to speak to the issues as we move towards energy diversification. They are the boots on the ground who are in the thick of it and who know well the different ways we can diversify in this tough economic climate.

Today's difficult times also serve as a reminder that economic diversification requires a prolonged approach in finding opportunities to build on our current areas of strength. There are no quick fixes. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's energy sector remains a key driver of the provincial economy, and if we want to create long-term, sustainable jobs, we need to diversify beyond just energy extraction into other areas of strengths.

Earlier, during the Member for West Yellowhead's statement, I was happy to hear about the innovative TM lignin recovery plant project happening in West Yellowhead. It's a great step towards economic diversification and finding new opportunities. As my colleague stated, in the March 8 Speech from the Throne we highlighted our government's will to establish the energy diversification advisory committee, which will provide advice on the steps needed to build a more diversified and resilient economy. As plans develop like my colleague's, I certainly urge the committee to engage with the various organizations that represent energy workers, whether that be PSAC, CAPP, Green Energy Alliance, or other groups in Nisku like Fox Oilfield, Trinidad Drilling, and Bulldog Energy. There's also a new initiative out there called Iron and Earth, which is led by oil sands workers committed to building Canada's green energy future. I encourage you guys to look it up. It's quite interesting.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are tired of these boom-and-bust cycles. Previous governments should have done a little better job of working with the companies in the energy sector to help them weather the storms of these global commodities markets. Workers and their families are struggling because of low prices of resources, something this government cannot control, but there are steps we can take. I'm glad that our government is fighting to include Edmonton, Leduc, and Nisku, which have been badly hit by the collapsing oil prices, in qualifying for the employment insurance changes that benefit workers in the rest of Alberta. It would certainly help people in my region to get through this downturn.

I support my colleague's motion as it speaks to our government's commitment to create value-added jobs during a time when Albertans are concerned about their economic security and represents the values of Albertans, who want a fair and prosperous economy. Mr. Speaker, I want this province to be an all-encompassing energy province. I know we can and I know we will get through these tough times stronger on the other side.

Thank you.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise today on behalf of my constituents in Lethbridge-East and to speak in favour of this motion put forward by my colleague the MLA from West Yellowhead. It is about engaging front-line workers.

In Lethbridge-East some of my constituents are affected directly through the loss of their jobs in the oil and gas industry, and some are affected indirectly through oil services industries. Nonetheless, they are affected as are we all. In Lethbridge-East we are affected a little less so than in other areas of the province because our economy is much more diversified, having much greater involvement in agriculture, being home to both a college and a university, and the spinoffs to those areas. We also sit next to the largest wind farm in

western Canada and a top-of-the-line biomass energy generator. We are an excellent example of economic diversification and energy diversification.

Mr. Speaker, given the lessened impact in Lethbridge compared to other areas in our province, specifically because our economy is diversified, this really speaks to the importance of investing in economic diversification throughout the province. Obviously, the natural course of action to deal with this crisis should be for our government to engage with energy sector workers when developing these new strategies, and we are.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the member, but under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for West Yellowhead to close debate on Motion 502.

Mr. Rosendahl: To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that Albertans need a diversified economy, an economy that is strong, tough, and flexible. This resilient economy will provide a buffer to energy price swings and will capture the full value of our resources. I'm proud to share that the government has set out a strong economic plan that includes investing in much-needed infrastructure to build the hospitals, schools, roads, and bridges Albertans rely on; supporting the private sector and creating jobs; improving access to capital for entrepreneurs; and encouraging innovation across a variety of sectors.

As I indicated in my member's statement earlier today, Hinton Pulp, by using its collaborator FPInnovations patented LignoForce process to recover lignin from black liquor, will see the construction of Canada's first commercial lignin recovery plant. This local project is an example of true collaboration, entrepreneurship, and a community dialogue that was open to new and innovative business ideas.

We must not forget that Albertans' resource sector remains a key driver of the provincial economy. Mr. Speaker, as our province endures the current economic challenges due to the drop in the global price of coal and oil – and oil is still below \$40 a barrel – it has become more apparent than ever that we must invest in economic diversification to ensure that Albertans are not casualties in what has become a boom-and-bust economy.

We have about 158,900 people working in the natural resources industry, which includes workers in our mines, quarries, natural oil and gas sectors, and we must not fail to mention the other spinoff companies. Hence, Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely essential that our government engage with resource sector workers when developing new strategies. Listening to workers and industrial leaders must always remain at the forefront of the government's agenda. They should be informed, consulted, and discussed with so that they, too, have an equal say in their future. Hence, I urge the government to engage with resource sector workers when developing strategies that diversify Alberta's energy sector and create value-added jobs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to stand up in the House and speak to this issue. It is a privilege. I look forward to hearing from and working with all my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly on this important issue.

Thank you very much.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 carried]

The Speaker: The Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 10.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m.]

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