



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, June 22, 2015

Day 5

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature
First Session

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Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawwood (ND)
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Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
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van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Vacant, Calgary-Foothills

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 21 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, June 22, 2015

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'll call the committee to order.

Bill 3 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2)

The Chair: Are you ready, hon. minister?

Mr. Ceci: I am. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2): I'd like to ask for the support of my colleagues for this estimate. When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$56 million for the Legislative Assembly, \$15.4 billion in expense funding, \$2 billion in capital investment funding, \$765 million for financial transactions funding for the government, and, finally, \$387 million for the transfer from the lottery fund to the general revenue fund.

The purpose of this supply bill is to ensure that the government has the spending authority to continue delivering a high level of services and programs to Albertans until the full budget is in place in the fall. That's five months' spending. In this interim supply bill we propose increased funding, to the tune of \$624 million, for core services that Albertans elected us to fix like health, education, postsecondary institutions, and protecting vulnerable populations. Reflected in this interim supply bill is funding to reverse cuts to health care and restoring stable, predictable funding for the vital public services that matter most to Albertan communities.

This interim supply bill will help to avoid cutting more than 1,500 nursing and health care positions by increasing funding to the Ministry of Health. This bill also reflects a commitment to the children and young people of Alberta. The increased funding to the Ministry of Education will fund regular operations, including school capital commitments, the teachers' agreement, and the commitment made by this government in May to reverse grant cuts and to fully fund enrolment. An investment in postsecondary education will mean an immediate tuition freeze at institutions across the province. Bill 3 would also roll back market modifier increases that were introduced in December 2014 for 25 programs across the province. Finally, increased funding to the Ministry of Human Services will strengthen services for children in care, ensuring that vulnerable families have the supports they need to lead successful lives in their communities.

Madam Chair, this interim supply bill will meet these commitments as well as allow the normal business of the province to continue until the full 2015-16 estimates are approved by this House in the fall. In the past few days some of my colleagues have expressed concern over the lack of detail in the bill. I can assure you that all of this will be addressed by our government as we will be putting forward a detailed budget this fall, which will include a line-by-line breakdown of where the funding will be allotted. Those budget documents will include comprehensive budget information in the form of the government's fiscal and business plans, the ministry

business plans, and the government estimates. These estimates will be debated when the budget documents are tabled in the fall.

Until then our government will ensure that government departments have the spending authority for five months and the funding to continue operating until the budget can be tabled. I urge all my colleagues on all sides of the House to support the bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for . . .

Mr. Smith: Drayton Valley-Devon.

The Chair: Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. We will get this eventually, won't we?

You know, I want to speak to the appropriation interim supply bill tonight. I'm not even sure that I can get my head around how big this bill really is. I mean, does anybody here really understand \$18.6 billion and then spending all that money for all of the government ministry areas? I'm told that it's the biggest supply bill in the history of Alberta. I guess congratulations are in order. You just outdid the PCs.

The problem with this bill is that it allows the government to spend huge amounts of money. I mean, as shadow minister of Education – in just my area, my portfolio of Education, it's allocating \$2.7 billion. Trust me; on a teacher's wage that's an incredible amount of money, okay? Two billion dollars for expenses, \$700 million for capital, and that's the total, sum detail that we've got for this. When I go to my constituents, when I go and talk to my stakeholders in education, they'd like a little more detail, and they'd like to know, have an indication of how that money is going to be spent. Where's that money going to come from? How are we going to be accountable for spending this money?

You've not addressed, even talked about the spending problem that the previous governments have had and, I'm beginning to believe, that you're going to have. You know, again, when I go back to my constituents, when I have to talk to the people that elected me, they're going to be asking me: "Well, you're in the Legislature. You're the one that's expected to hold the government accountable." When I get an interim supply appropriation bill like this, with so little detail in it, I just don't know how I can support it.

We know that the PC interim supply bill set aside \$65 million to accelerate 50 new schools and 70 modernizations for 2014-15. Were these completed, or were they part of this interim supply bill? Are you including them in it? I don't know. Forty-one point seven million dollars was budgeted under the PCs for 35 new schools and modernizations that had been delayed. Were these projects completed, or are they part of this interim supply bill? I can't tell you. I'm not even sure that you can tell me. At least, you haven't.

You're asking us in this House, on both sides, to approve a blank cheque, and I don't believe that that's in Alberta's best interests. Where will the money come from? We know that the PCs were going to have and campaigned on a \$5.7 billion deficit in their election budget. We know that Albertans didn't support that budget. We know that this government – well, at least, it's our best guess – is going to have a deficit of somewhere around \$7 billion this fiscal year. Well, we're not sure. Why do you think that Albertans will support a larger debt? When I campaigned, I didn't hear Albertans saying: let's dig ourselves a deeper hole. We haven't had any of those kinds of discussions, and before I can support this, I need to know where that money is going to come from.

I think that we have a bit of a spending problem. I thought it before the election, I thought it during the election, and I still think that we have a spending problem with this new government. We know that you can't tax your way to prosperity. It's never happened anywhere. Only when tax rates provide a real Alberta advantage will businesses be prosperous, and only when people have jobs and when the taxes are low will people spend and will governments be able to collect the taxes they need to run the government. My kids at high school understood this. I think that we understand this; at least, we should. Using deficits and debts rather than spending cuts to balance budgets is very unwise.

7:40

I don't think that too many of us here run our personal finances that way. I was a teacher. My wife stayed at home. We had three kids. We had to spend our money wisely. I've never owned a new car. I can remember having arguments with my two brothers, who make considerably more money than I do, saying: you know, it's not child abuse if my kids don't go to Hawaii. If they never see Mickey in person, they'll live. It's okay. We'll have a good time having vacations in one of the best places in the world. It's called Alberta. We'll do cross-country skiing instead of downhill skiing because we can't afford it, and they'll play basketball because they can't afford to play hockey perhaps.

We made the tough choices, and we made the tough decisions so that we balanced our budget. We don't have a big house. We've got a nice house. It needs a new roof if anybody wants to come and help me shingle it. I've had to learn how to work on my cars and my vehicles. I hate skinned knuckles, but I learned how to do it. YouTube is a wonderful thing. "Dad, figure it out. This is how you change the brakes." We made those decisions and those tough decisions so that my wife could stay home, so that my kids could play basketball, so that they would have the opportunity to go to university, so we could set the money aside. You see, in your personal finances that's what you do when you're responsible citizens.

Just because we got elected, I don't believe that we're not called to be responsible citizens any longer. We're called to be the most responsible citizens. We're charged with carrying out the finances of this province, so we have to be very careful when we decide to rack up deficits and when we decide to rack up debt. Debts and deficits are only a tax on the future and on the future generations. I always told my family: if we can't pay for it now, what makes you think we're going to be able to pay for it in the future?

In the long run debt and deficits take away your choices. I don't think there's anybody over here that's disagreeing with me. If you want freedom, you have to be fiscally responsible. If you want to take care of your children in the education system, you have to take care of the economy and your budget. If you want to have good health care services, you have to take care of the basics. Our motto. It's right there. Liber: freedom. Real freedom comes from when you can control your spending, and in the long run it makes it harder to provide the programs that all Albertans need if we don't do the job right here today.

That's why I was really hoping that when I looked at this interim supply bill, we would see more details. We'd be able to know where that money is going to be spent, where that money is going to come from. I don't think that those are unreasonable expectations being placed on us by the people of Alberta. I realize you're new; we're new. But we've got to get this right.

Thank you.

The Chair: Next on my list I have Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise in this Chamber to discuss this government's rather grandiose spending package bundled together into Bill 3, the interim supply act, or as I like to call it, the NDP's minibudget.

On May 5 I along with my colleagues in the Wildrose caucus were elected to this Legislature to ensure that the government does not receive a blank cheque on spending. I'm sure that the NDP also campaigned on this, yet with this minibudget the NDP is asking for just that. With so many questions and such little time to discuss them, this government is hiding in the shadows. To say, "Stay tuned," isn't good enough when communities need answers now. It is a shame that the NDP is attempting to limit the debate on this bill, a bill that cost a total of 18 billion of Alberta's tax dollars. When the amount of dollars is divided by the amount of time allocated to debate on this bill, only one mere minute is given for every \$83 million spent. That, Madam Chair, is beyond distasteful.

That is why I stand here today to demand on behalf of my constituents of Cardston-Taber-Warner and on behalf of all Albertans a full picture on the state of this province's finances. Albertans would like to know why this minibudget is being squeezed through the Legislature without a full debate session, why this bill is hardly being publicized, publicly discussed for all Albertans to hear. Questions of democratic and parliamentary due process surely arise.

Speaking of poor practices by members of the Alberta government, it is important to note that the will of Albertans is being denied. Many elites will tell you that this past election Albertans voted in a new government because they wanted change. Change. I ask you, Madam Chair: where is that change? This minibudget, which the government is set to pass, is the exact same budget that was passed by Premier Alison Redford and the PCs. Now, that was over three Premiers ago. Thankfully, however, Albertans have the Wildrose, the only party to stand up against these poor practices and the ideas of yesterday.

As to the question of fiscal transparency and clarity, why is this government hiding the true details of spending included in this bill? Albertans were first informed that this government intended to spend \$1.8 billion in net new spending. That number was then changed to \$775 million. Now we're being told that the new spending will only encompass \$624 million. Which is it, Madam Chair? Are Albertans not entitled to this information? More importantly, where is the money coming for this new spending?

Lastly, I would like to draw this Chamber's attention to the fact that no definitive timeline has been given yet with regard to a full budget. The implementation of a budget is the government's number one job for it sets the agenda on the government's priorities and the economic state of Alberta. Businesses look to the Legislature for guidance on the province's economic outlook. Families from Carway to Conklin and everywhere in between look to this Legislature for hope and prosperity as the budget details the economic reality that will directly affect their lives and their pocketbooks. Yet to this date the NDP have refused to inform this Chamber of when we can expect a full budget. This refusal to paint a picture as to when and where this government will take this province's economy is simply unacceptable.

I along with my colleagues on this side of the Chamber are willing and ready to help the government with implementing a timeline on the budget. We suggest that a full budget be presented to this Chamber in September. We've suggested this many times. I invite this government to accept our suggestion and provide a budget in September so that families, communities, and businesses across this province can have full confidence in the government's plan going forward. Enough with the hiding. It's time to work on behalf of Albertans for the future of this magnificent province.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I'd like to call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have questions about education. I would just like to ask if the capital allotments are going to keep school construction in Calgary-Bow on schedule.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the important question. Not only is Calgary-Bow an area of concern; there are growing parts of our province everywhere. In conversations with two ministers it's my understanding that these projects are going ahead. If I'm wrong on that, we'll be sure to advise the member in writing as soon as possible and all members. But as far as I'm aware, it's absolutely on schedule to continue with the construction as planned out.

7:50

Ms Drever: That's good to hear. Thank you, minister.

Now, these building projects are based on the previous government's promises. My riding is still in desperate need of preschools and elementary schools. Will this government be promising new schools, and, if so, when will that be?

Mr. Mason: Thanks, hon. member, for that question. It is government's objective to continue with the announced schools. There are three tiers of them, which could be named after the Premier's term in which they were announced, if you wanted, but there are three groups, all of which this government intends to proceed with and to keep on time and on budget.

The Chair: Next on my list is the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair, for another opportunity to speak to the minibudget. There has been much said regarding Bill 3, and none of it has changed the government's reluctance to give us more information. All we ask for is the general fundamentals that we need before considering a new spending bill. All we want is for Albertans to know where this money is being spent.

Last week I asked the Minister of Finance five simple questions. One, how much money will the government spend? Two, how much revenue will the government collect? Three, what will be the deficit? Four, what will be the debt? Five, what will be the province's net financial assets at the end of the fiscal year? Stay tuned, Madam Chair. I have seen the previous government dodge questions and provide no answers. I was hoping that it would be different with the new government. I was hoping that this government would help Albertans understand where the NDP is going to be spending their hard-earned tax dollars. I was hoping that this government would not take a page from the third party's handbook and hide important financial details from Alberta taxpayers.

Last week, to my great surprise, I received five answers. When the NDP held a press conference to say where the money was being spent, I was ecstatic. I was so excited that this government was going to be different and give us information. I was excited that this government would give us answers and not leave us grasping in the dark. Alas, the press release did not match the numbers announced by the minister at the press conference. In fact, over the course of the week the NDP released to the public five different answers to the same question.

Let me back up for a minute. These answers, whether they were mistakes, typos, or misplaced decimals, were only half of one of my questions. A spending projection refers to the full expenditures of the entire budget, not just four ministries. That point aside, those

five answers to that half of one question did not answer half of the question in any way, shape, or form. In fact, there were so many ways that it didn't answer any of my questions that I don't really know where to begin.

Let me outline to the House what each of these numbers was so that the House can get a glimpse as to why I think the government so desperately needs our help. First, the Government House Leader announced that new spending would total 10 per cent of interim supply.

Mr. Mason: That was a very approximate figure, as you know.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Very approximate, and we are staying tuned, Madam Chair.

Interim supply is \$18 billion. Ten per cent of \$18 billion is \$1.8 billion. That \$1.8 billion matched up quite well with their election platform. When a press release was sent out stating that spending would only be \$776 million, the idea that the NDP decided overnight to drop \$1 billion in spending was almost as welcome as it was unbelievable. But we were wrong, or they were wrong, or maybe the person who typed out the press release was wrong because at the press conference all of the numbers added up to \$682 million.

Almost \$100 million more was gone from their spending. Now, this was my lucky day, ladies and gentlemen. Maybe by the end of the day there would be a balanced budget. On my walk to one of the local food trucks for some schnitzel I was on the lookout for pigs flying over the sky palace. Hours later the Government House Leader announced that new spending was only \$624 million. By this point I was hoping that this day had more hours in it for a night sitting so that I could hear a lower number still. But to my disappointment, later in that same statement from the Government House Leader, he said: "that is the bulk of the additional \$1.1 billion." My lucky day had turned into a very confusing day, Madam Chair. Which number is correct? Which number are they actually spending? Do they know what they are actually spending? If the \$1.1 billion is the true number, then where is the other \$500 million being spent?

So I asked the Minister of Finance today: which is the correct number? Even the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board did not know. He gave us, ladies and gentlemen, a sixth number. The Minister of Finance said: somewhere in the \$600 million range. That is literally – and I don't often say literally – a range of \$100 million, give or take. Maybe he'll go Dutch with taxpayers' money and cut \$500 million from the budget. Does the Minister of Finance still not know where the \$100 million is being spent?

When this bill was put forward for discussion, it was allocated a total of six hours of debate for both readings. These six hours happened after weeks of planning by the NDP, and I hope that that planning was done with a functional calculator. This amount of time, six hours, was deemed to be enough time to give Albertans an understanding of where their tax dollars are being spent. If the Minister of Finance, the person in charge of Alberta's finances, does not know where the money is being spent, then how in the world are Albertans supposed to know?

I understand that the NDP isn't quite able to provide us with the full details of an entire budget right at this moment. That is understandable. But they could at least provide us with basic, unchanging details on this bill. Let me rephrase that. They could at least provide themselves with basic, unchanging details on this bill. The point I'm trying to make is that this bill is no better than, to borrow a quote from the Minister of Finance today, a "budget on the back of a napkin." In fact, it seems the napkin was spilt on and the NDP can't read the numbers anymore.

So, in closing, I'm not only disappointed but troubled by the answers the government has been giving us or not giving us. Fiscal competence and responsibility matter to Albertans, and the government has not been showing it. They should realize that one of the biggest reservations that Albertans have about an NDP government is whether or not they care about the books. Madam Chair, this government needs help. I've been trying to help here by giving the government the opportunity to show that it does care and that it has its ducks in a row. I know that there are many capable officials in the Department of Finance that can provide these estimates of the numbers. But for some reason or another the minister is holding back even these rudimentary details.

I don't like the fact that this bill allows unchecked spending until the end of November. I don't like that these spending increases are significant, but this government has said nothing about reductions anywhere, despite inheriting the most bloated government in the country. I don't like that the Premier has simply shrugged off the possibility that she is delaying presenting the budget until after the federal election. She knows that it will be a record deficit and record debt. The Premier perhaps does not want this to reflect badly on her comrades before October 19.

Madam Chair, I was not elected by the people of Strathmore-Brooks to give this government a blank cheque for an unidentified sum of new spending. I did not spend six years with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation fighting for taxpayers and fiscal responsibility just to give the government a blank cheque on new spending. Twenty-one Wildrose MLAs were not elected to rubber-stamp a spending bill that is irresponsibly spending in the dark without any details.

Madam Chair, the Wildrose caucus will be voting against this bill.

8:00

The Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Good evening. Thank you, Madam Chair. Albertans deserve answers, and we're not getting a lot of answers. We all know that this government is new. We're being patient, but what we want to know is: where is the money coming from, and where is it going?

This budget was a budget that was built three Premiers ago. What I want to know is: do you still have the sky palace renovations in there? Quite a few campaigns ago this budget was created under a former Premier's direction. Some significant events happened since that time: the Oilers won another first-round draft pick, and the NDP formed government.

Three hours to debate a budget that was drafted by a party that both our party and the governing party campaigned against. We're here to hold the government to account, to be the check on their power. We are worried that three hours is not enough time for this and that we are not getting a lot of answers. Our sense of what this government is spending \$18 billion on is rough at best. In fact, our strongest sense is that the NDP may not know exactly what they're spending this money on. There are a lot of questions on how much the spending is going up by and what for.

Albertans deserve to know where their money is going. This legislator deserves to know where the tax dollars are being spent. I can't tell if the government isn't telling us where the money is going because they don't know yet or because they don't want us to know. I guess we'll have four years to assess how transparent this government was.

I am concerned about how our small businesses will react, how families will react. They want to know that Alberta is a stable, responsible place to invest, a place to raise a family. We want to

reassure our energy sector that this government at hand is going to be responsible, provide stable leadership, and do its part for the promotion of prosperity in this province.

As you all well know, the Wildrose would never dream of raising taxes. I suspect that those who are about to see their taxes raised may want to brace for this, perhaps pass on that vacation they kind of planned for to make other expenses. Like the rest of Alberta, Wildrose wants to know where the tax dollars are going. This isn't much time to debate it. It's an enormous amount of money, and with so many conflicting statements about how much money is being used, we just want some transparency, and we want some accountability. We want to know where our money is going, and we believe that Albertans want the same.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead. You can speak, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. My questions won't be a surprise to the government because they're questions that I asked the last time we were here, and I didn't get them answered then. In fairness, the government has had a weekend to think about it since we were last here, so I think that based on the fact that they've had a few days to know what the question is, perhaps they've come up with an answer.

When we last met, it was established that the government had \$1.8 billion in additional spending in the estimates. The government – I don't know if detailed is the right word because there wasn't a lot of detail. Nonetheless, they identified around \$700 million or \$600 million in spending that they're adding. I'm sorry I did that, but I think I badgered the House leader, and he identified another \$600 million in taxes that the government is going to roll back. So that takes us to \$1.2 billion. So there's still \$500 million or \$600 million unidentified from the original \$1.8 billion. With another four or five days to think about it, I will ask the government again: can you tell me what the additional spending is with the \$500 million or \$600 million that you weren't able to identify last week when we were in here, please?

That was a question.

Mr. Ceci: Sorry. I thought it was rhetorical.

I can share with you, leader of the third party, that we will spend money on things that were planned to be reduced in your platform. Additionally, we will not collect money that was going to be taxes in your platform. Those are the two buckets that are in this interim supply that are new or different. Everything else comes out of this book that was tabled in this Legislature by the hon. Robin Campbell on March 26, 2015. As I said before, we have extended this by five months. So we just followed through with this.

The program spending is identified in the many pages of this book, and that's what we're following for the time being, until we can get our ducks in a row for a budget later this fall. I will just say that if you wanted to know what the new investments are, it's \$500 million for Health, \$100 million a month for five months; Education, \$45 million; Advanced Education, \$40 million; and Human Services, \$39 million. So those are the expenditures that we are replacing that were planned to be cut. Then there are monies that we're not going to be able to collect, that were proposed as levies and fees that we're not going to be following through with.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: So, Madam Chair, listening carefully, the Finance minister identified \$500 million or \$600 million. While the numbers weren't exactly the same and my colleague in the Official Opposition pointed out that the numbers seem to be a little fluid, nonetheless they're in the same ballpark as the original \$500

million or \$600 million. Then you identified another \$600 million you're not taking, so that still gets us to about \$1.2 billion or \$1.3 billion depending on which set of numbers you use. The Finance minister says that there isn't any more. I guess the new spending has now gone down from \$1.8 billion to \$1.3 billion. Either there's \$500 million that I haven't been told about or the new spending has gone down from \$1.8 billion to \$1.3 billion. Can I just get that clarification, please?

Mr. Ceci: I don't think I ever indicated that the spending was \$1.8 billion. That may have been said in the early parts of the debate here, but the actual numbers are much lower, and they're in the two buckets that I mentioned.

Mr. McIver: That was good clarification, Minister. Thank you.

So, Madam Chair, we solved part of the mystery. We're down from \$1.8 billion of new spending to \$1.3 billion. I'm not sure if the taxpayers saved \$500 million or whether we just got improved information on what we had before. However, I'm grateful for the answers that we are getting.

I guess that with that in mind, since the plan currently is to bring forward a budget in October, presumably right after the federal election, my suggestion to the government is: do you think you could, especially being freshly elected, not take a four-month vacation and maybe bring the budget in sooner? No disrespect to the Official Opposition, but September 7 is a little late, too. Next month would be better. Is there any chance that you might do that?

8:10

Mr. Mason: Hon. member, is that how your government put together budgets? That might explain a great deal, Madam Chair. That might explain a great deal about the previous government's budgets.

My understanding, if I may, hon. member, based on my conversations with a number of Finance ministers that I had the honour and pleasure to know and ask questions of is that the process of building a budget takes several months and that, actually, when responsible budgets were produced in your government, there was a long process developing that. I'm beginning to work on a capital plan, which is my contribution to the budget that will be in October, and I know the amount of work that is entailed in that. I'm sure that some of your members who had previously served in the position of Minister of Infrastructure would be aware of the amount of work that goes into developing the capital budget.

This is not a small-potatoes operation, the government of Alberta, as you should well know.

An Hon. Member: It's complex.

Mr. Mason: It's complex.

We will not be taking a four-month vacation in order to postpone the development of the budget. The amount of time that we've selected has nothing to do with the federal election and has everything to do with the amount of time it will take a new government, the first in 43 years, to familiarize itself with the books of the previous government, to take a close look at the accounts, the finances of the province, and to determine exactly what expenditures are justified and what revenues can be depended upon.

I hope that answers your question, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Madam Chair, it's a pleasure working with this government, too, thus far. Although the information that we're getting is a little thin, it's still a pleasure. I would say that the Finance minister did wave around a document that the previous

government had produced, and we hope to have that much detail when the other budget comes.

Mr. Cooper: Are you here to help, too?

Mr. McIver: No, I'm not going to offer to go to the other side and help. That's already been done.

I will say that even when we did estimates, hon. members – I noticed that what you put in front of us had three pages of numbers. Even the least we could find of when we did estimates was 24-plus pages, so hopefully we'll have more details soon.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I have here the interim estimates produced by the previous government, 2015-16 interim supply estimates, and I have the one that we have provided, 2015-16 interim supply estimates no. 2. They are virtually the same number of pages, same number of figures. The format that was used by the previous government is the format that our government has used.

Mr. McIver: Madam Chair, while I agree that what the hon. member showed is a real document, it's not the only document that was available.

We could do this all night, couldn't we?

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just following on the notion that the Finance minister put out there last week that the interim supply is essentially the previous budget, based on that, for a period of five months. So you divide it by the number of months, and you multiply it by five. With that in mind, though, I'd like to ask a couple of questions, if I may, where I don't think the math adds up to that model.

For example, in the area of Education if operational expenditures are multiplied by five they should be \$1.763 billion, but there's actually \$225 million additional to that. I'd like to know where that's going. That's an additional \$225 million. I'd love to know where that money is actually being spent.

There are many other examples of this, but perhaps we can start with that Education example. If somebody from the other side would like to answer that question, I'd very much appreciate it.

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. As we'll all remember, on May 5 Albertans gave this government a mandate to make sure that we fund growth, and funding growth is where the allocation is going. It's my understanding that the additional dollars other than – continuing on with the previous budget, when you fund growth, it's \$45 million for those five months. I'd be happy to follow up offline and provide some clarity around that math.

But it's around funding the growth, the 12,000 new students who are coming to Alberta, and ensuring not just that they have the allocation for teachers but also reversing the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cuts, the English language learner cuts, ensuring that the cuts that were being proposed are reversed and funded through our interim supply bill.

Some of the questions around the math not adding up are actually because announcements had been made around what this would cost for the full year. Of course, we're not going to make a commitment to fund Education in November, change that, because the allocations actually go out in September. So the interim supply amount is \$45 million, but of course the full calendar year for the

school year is greater than that, and that'll be incorporated into our budget for full debate in the fall.

So the interim supply amount is for the five months, bringing us through until the end of November. But there will be additional educational costs because kids go to school until the end of June.

Mr. Bhullar: Madam Chair, I thank the Minister of Health for that information. However, the math still doesn't add up. I'm looking at \$225 million, not \$45 million. If this is \$225 million over the course of five months, then over the course of 12 months we're looking at an additional over half billion dollars that's going into the Department of Education, and we don't know why. The growth is not over a half billion dollars, and there were no cuts to education that would come anywhere close to a half billion dollars. So I'd love to know where that money is going.

Moving on, because I don't think we'll get further concrete examples of the answers today, well, we'll go to Health. Why not go to Health? Based on, again, that same model a five-month extension should be \$7.412 billion, but it's actually \$7.746 billion, which is an additional \$333 million in expenditures in the Department of Health for five months. I'd love to know where that is going.

I'll also put out a question to the Minister of Human Services. Last week the minister said that the department is getting an extra \$39 million in spending over the course of five months. In actuality it's \$51.3 million of extra spending over the course of five months. So the numbers don't seem to add up here, sir.

We take the example of Advanced Education. It's \$91.2 million over and above the five-month funding envelope that the ministers have told us that they're trying to fund.

Then you go into some departments, and there seem to be some pretty significant cuts. We'll start with Justice. Again, on the same model – you take the expenses over 12 months, you divide it by 12, and then you multiply it five – the Department of Justice's operational expenses for the five months should be \$528 million, but it's actually \$473 million. That is a cut of \$54 million. So I'd love to know where that money is coming from. Are there police officers or sheriffs or peace officers across this province that will not be funded?

I'd love to know the answers to these couple of departments if I may. That's Human Services, that's Health, and that's Justice, and then we'll proceed on from there.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

8:20

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the opportunity to provide some clarity around the Health expenses. In terms of the first interim supply bill, the pre-election interim supply bill, it was \$4.7 billion approved by this House to ensure that we could operate health care until the end of June. The additional interim supply being requested is to provide funds until November 30. Schedule 2 would have been \$7.3 billion. The amounts for the June and November interim supply originally requested were based on the proposed budget tabled March 26. This has been mentioned.

The pressures being forecast for the remainder of the 2015-16 fiscal year are evolving based on actual 2014-15 expenses and more current program information, allowing more reliable forecasts than the original estimates. There are three areas where significant pressures have been identified: Alberta Health Services' base operating funding pressures of \$345 million – that includes components like compensation – and development pressures of

\$248 million and drugs and supplemental health benefits pressures of \$61 million, for a total of \$654 million.

To provide the interim supply for April to November, these additional pressures and adjustments amount to \$500 million, as mentioned, which has been added, so now rather than asking for \$7.3 billion, we're asking for \$7.8 billion.

I hope you like my numbers. They'll be on the record.

Mr. Bhullar: Even then, Minister, I don't think our numbers are matching up, but regardless, I do appreciate your providing some information. It seems as if the department and the government have chosen to fund cost pressures for this five-month period, which we believe are based on growth. For the purposes of déjà vu, I'll remind the Government House Leader – I remember him standing up in this Assembly, asking many times: how many dollars are going to go towards bonuses in that 300-plus million dollars?

Mr. Mason: How many were?

Mr. Bhullar: Well, I'm asking you, sir. I'll guess we'll find out in five months.

But I wonder if the Minister of Human Services or the Minister of Justice can provide clarification on their numbers.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you for raising this. I don't have exact numbers before me, but I remember explaining that the additional funding we're getting is going to child intervention; FCSS, family and community services; and there was an additional \$1 million that was reserved for the ministry responsible for the status of women. That's where the increase is going, and that's what I explained the other day as well.

Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Thank you to the hon. member. I'm not aware that there are any cuts in my budget. The way our budget document was prepared, the budget document for Justice and Solicitor General, was that costs that are paid equally over the course of the year, based on the previous government's budget, were sort of divided by 12, but there are some costs that occur in Justice and Solicitor General that don't go out evenly. There are municipal policing grants that go out at the end of June. Legal aid funding goes out two times a year, and I believe that one of those falls within but the other doesn't. So in terms of cutbacks there haven't been any cutbacks. The funding was sort of continued forward in exactly the same manner. It's just that some of it is unevenly disbursed. But if you had further questions, I can definitely get back to you with further details.

Mr. Bhullar: Well, thank you very much, Minister. There are many grants that go out at different times throughout the year, so that may be the beginning to the question. I mean, it's a very significant amount of money, so if you could provide us with the specifics of that, I would very much appreciate that.

Moving on to the Department of Seniors, I actually don't see any capital investments for the Department of Seniors, so I wonder where any of the seniors' housing or capital grant funding is going to be coming from, the sprinkler enhancements, the safety enhancements that were under way in many of the seniors' lodges across the province. I don't see any capital investments for the Department of Seniors in the document. In addition to that I see, based on your five-month model, a cut of almost \$15 million over the course of five months, so I'd like to know where that is going.

In addition, I'll ask the Minister of Service Alberta. Again, based on this five-month model, you're down about \$9 million in your

operating expenses and \$7 million in your capital expenditures, so I'd love to know where that difference is actually coming up from.

I think that if we start with Seniors and Service Alberta, that would be great.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the opportunity to address a question. What I've submitted to my hon. colleague was not anything around cuts. It was around maintaining the same ratio that had been proposed by the previous government, the three-twelfths of what the overall budget was. This is for the five-twelfths piece. So there aren't any cuts that we're proposing in terms of operating for Seniors. I'd be happy to follow up offline. I am confident that the sprinkler project is moving forward, to give you a little assurance on that one.

Mr. Bhullar: Sure. So, Minister, then just because I don't see the capital investments, does that mean that that infrastructure spending, that capital investment piece, has moved somewhere else? It's not in your interim supply, so does that mean it's now with the Minister of Infrastructure or Health or somebody else?

Ms Hoffman: I know I'm supposed to answer questions, but was it in your interim supply? That would be my question to prepare us for . . .

Mr. Bhullar: We had a capital budget for the Department of Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: I will be very happy to follow up with details afterwards around that specific – I'm not proposing any cuts to capital through the interim supply bill. Obviously, we'll have an opportunity to be able to debate the full capital proposal in the fall, when we bring that forward, but in terms of interim supply our purpose for the Ministry of Seniors was status quo throughout the summer and to bring us into November, so I'll be happy to have a little follow-up offline to get further details on that.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you. It's a very similar situation with Service Alberta, hon. member, that there weren't any cuts proposed. It was using the previous administration's interim supply numbers, obviously divided by 12, extending it for the five months, but there are no proposed cuts in this five-month interim window that we're tabling this bill for.

Mr. Mason: Can I supplement that, please, hon. member? I'm just looking at the interim supply bill that was introduced by the previous government, and the format for Seniors is precisely the same: expense and financial transactions and no capital investment line under that department. So while I don't have a definitive answer for him, I suspect, hon. member, that those items are probably contained in the Infrastructure budget, and I will endeavour to break those out and send them to him. But there's no capital line for Seniors in this interim supply bill or the interim supply bill that your government introduced.

Mr. Bhullar: I thank both ministers, but if we're starting with Service Alberta, according to my calculations and the numbers you're actually down almost \$9 million on the operations side, and you're down about \$7 million on the capital side, which is a bit surprising because Service Alberta, well, I guess has the IT capital.

Actually, this is a great time for me to ask a follow-up on that. In this year's proposed budget, as a part of our capital planning

exercise, one of the things that I proposed to do was to bring down our IT costs across government. This is an area that can have runaway costs, and we proposed to bring that down by 5 per cent this year and 10 per cent the years following, so I'd love to know, maybe, if your officials actually followed the plan that we had put forward and are actually making that cut.

With respect to the Seniors capital investment piece, to the Minister of Infrastructure, I'm looking at a document here that does have \$15.5 million in infrastructure spending. Now, perhaps my staff has put in the budgetary number as opposed to the interim supply number, so we can have a chat about that, but if you would endeavour to tell us where the ASLI money is and the money to upgrade the seniors' facilities and the seniors' lodges across the province, that would be very much appreciated. Similar to the question I asked last week as well, whether that's housed in Health now or Infrastructure, I'd love to know where that money is, how much there is. Within this five-month period my assumption is that if the money is in there for the five-month period, you will then begin to fund projects that are coming online. So some clarification around that would be very, very much appreciated.

8:30

I don't see the minister of agriculture here, but agriculture . . . [interjections] Oh, my apologies. I forgot about that. No, seriously, I did. I'm not used to being on this side, Madam Chair.

Mr. Bilous: Get used to it.

Mr. Bhullar: You know what? To the hon. minister: there's something about humility, and we always had it, my friend. We always had it. We always had it.

But the minister of agriculture – so I'd put this forward to the government. There seems to be an additional \$103 million here based on, again, that take the budget, divide it by 12, and then multiply it by five model. That should be \$232 million. It's actually \$336 million, so I'd love to know where that extra \$103 million is going.

Similarly, in the department of culture we have an extra \$54 million. Based on, again, the government's model, they should be at \$121 million approximately. They're actually at \$174 million, so where's that extra \$54 million?

I'll put that forth for the ministers of agriculture and culture. No takers, Madam Chair.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Those are a number of detailed questions, hon. member, all good and valid questions, which deserve a response. However, at least speaking for myself, I'm going to have to have my department provide those numbers, and I will provide those to all members of the House in written form as soon as possible.

Have you completed your questions?

The Chair: Hon. member, there's only about 30 seconds left of this 20-minute segment. You can go back on the list later.

Mr. Bhullar: Oh, 30 seconds. What I've learned from members opposite, Madam Chair, is don't give any one of your seconds up, so I will take my last 25 seconds.

I would ask the Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation and Government House Leader if we can actually expect these answers from today and from last week to be tabled in this House before we vote on this bill in third reading?

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I will endeavour for my part to get these numbers for you as soon as possible and provide them as well to all

members of the House. So thank you for those questions. They're all good questions.

At this point, Madam Chair, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 1

An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thanks, Madam Chair. First, before I get started, I just want to note that earlier today my friend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort noted – and I think he did try to correct it, but I want to clarify that Wildrose is in fact in support of Bill 1 and that this caucus does support Bill 1. The Wildrose Party supports Bill 1, and I support Bill 1.

Wildrose has long campaigned on banning corporate and union donations. We think our democracy works better when only individuals are allowed to make contributions to political parties. We think that doing it any other way either results in a key entrenched interest having too much power over political direction or, worse, it creates a pay-to-play environment such as has happened in Alberta for the last few years.

We are quite pleased to see that big labour and big business both will be curtailed in their ability to wield undue influence. This will also prevent any government from using pay-to-play to shake down industry, and that's a good thing. Wildrose has proposed amendments to ban these political donations before, but the PC majorities of the past have defeated all of them. It is a policy that we're glad the NDP has adopted from the Wildrose.

However, there are still massive loopholes, Madam Chair, that mean that with this bill we are not in fact ending corporate and union donations. Loopholes here allow unions to cover political loans, in some cases without reporting them. We will try to fix that with an amendment, but the governing party obviously has a use for union or corporations backstopping loans. There is this huge loophole about in-kind donations, particularly the in-kind donations of service. Notwithstanding what the minister said in the House last week, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act does not define services in any relevant way. The provision of services is not discussed in the definition of contributions.

It's very clear that the provision of services by a union or corporation, either free or at a discount, remains a loophole in this legislation. This means that corporations or union bosses could donate their employees' time, either in providing services or doing union- or business-paid volunteer work. This happens already, it's legal already, and this law won't change it. We tried to close this loophole, but the government is keen to keep that loophole in law. We have to wonder why. We are hopeful that in the upcoming all-party committee we will see some clarity on what this government had in mind by leaving these loopholes available.

We also tried to fix the coming-into-force provision of this law, which will be largely unenforceable. Notwithstanding, again, what the minister said last week in the House or to the media, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act does not require any party, constituency association, or candidate to give the date of when they received their contribution. The law only requires them to disclose which period the donation arrived in. We should have fixed that. Elections Alberta wanted us to fix that, and I don't know why the government chose not to carefully read the law. I would

point out that by not fixing that, this could result in a very embarrassing situation where this government's first bill might end up in the courts or could conceivably be overturned in part or, at very least, held up.

With that aside, let's see if I can't fix one of these other loopholes tonight. One of the key problems in this bill is that it has two strange provisions which still allow indirect influence of unions and corporations on matters that the bill takes away their direct influence on. Specifically, this bill will continue to allow the practice of unions and corporations guaranteeing loans to political parties, constituency associations, and candidates. They can do this by way of signing a guarantee, cosigning, or providing collateral security for any loan, monetary obligation, or indebtedness.

We have serious concerns about unions and corporations being able to put cash on deposit so that a political party can take out a loan to run its activities. If corporations and unions can't contribute, Madam Chair, why should they be allowed to finance a political party, constituency association, or candidate? What conceivable public policy reason is there for this? If you can't give money, why should you be able to curry favour by putting a million dollars on deposit?

I also note that the law has no limit as to the size of the guarantee, so a union or corporation could advance a political party millions or enough money to even run a complete campaign. But, Madam Chair, it gets worse. This current law would allow a union or a corporation to make payments on a loan, and as long as those payments were reimbursed before the end of the year, there would be no need to disclose the payments.

So we have a system whereby a union or corporation could put a million dollars on deposit with a bank on January 1 and guarantee a political party a \$1 million loan. This political party could use that million dollars for campaigning in, say, an election, and if the party got in a cash crunch, the company or union could pay the interest payments on that million dollar loan. So long as the company or union was reimbursed by the end of the year, nothing would have been done wrong, no one would have ever known, and there would be no need to report this. This is completely unacceptable. If unions and corporations shouldn't give, they shouldn't guarantee. They certainly shouldn't guarantee without any limits.

8:40

To fix this, we prepared an amendment to prevent guarantees by anyone other than individuals and to prevent the paying of loans by anyone other than individuals unless there has been a default. I have the appropriate number of copies of the amendment, Madam Chair, and I will wait for the pages to circulate then before I read the text of the amendment, which will basically delete corporations and unions from the loan section.

The Chair: We'll just pause for a moment while we pass out copies of the amendment. This will be known as amendment A3.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: Wildrose thinks this amendment really improves this bill. Wildrose certainly can't see a need for unions or corporations to backstop loans. We have never asked any company or union to backstop any loans or lines of credit. We've never even considered it. We hope the NDP will give Albertans some clarity on why they feel these organizations should still have this ability. Are unions financing the NDP? How much do unions have on deposit to guarantee the government party's loans and lines of credit? We should not pass this law until the government comes clean on this because putting loopholes in to protect government interests isn't what Bill 1 should be about.

Wildrose certainly doesn't see why corporations or unions would be allowed to make loan payments at all, even if they are later reimbursed, as this is still monetary assistance. If we truly want to get rid of corporate and union influence in the political process, Madam Chair, it does not make sense to have this provision continue in this bill. Allowing guarantees and loan payments still gives the impression that a political party could be seen as under the influence of special interests and not working for the direct interest of Albertans. We don't understand why the NDP has left these so-called transitional provisions in place that allow companies and unions to pay off loans for the rest of the year, but in the spirit of compromise and out of a desire to really see this amendment pass, we have left them in place, apart from insisting that payments are only made in the case of default.

We are also reassured by the Chief Electoral Officer that a party that failed to repay any of these payments would be on the hook for them as illegal donations. But we strongly believe that parties should be making their own payments, and we'd like some reassurance from the other party leaders in the House that they are not allowing any company or union to make any payments they might have. I can assure everyone here that we have no such payments. If there is a default on an existing loan, Madam Chair, that's another issue, and we have ensured that those who are on the hook for parties that might be unexpectedly broke are not breaking the law. That provision of this law is effective.

The continued existence of these types of provisions creates the impression that any party could be seen as under the influence of special interests and not working for the direct interest of Albertans. We just do not think that unions and corporations should backstop loans. Albertans will not approve of this. It specifically goes against the spirit of this bill and the arguments that the Premier and the Lieutenant Governor mentioned in the throne speech.

We hope the NDP will give Albertans some clarity on why they feel these organizations should still have this ability. Unless that argument is completely convincing, then every reasonable member of this Chamber should vote for this very reasonable amendment. Voting for this amendment is consistent with the will of Albertans and consistent with the spirit of this bill, Madam Chair, as well as consistent with every argument that the Premier and key government spokespeople have raised in defence of this bill.

If we are getting union and corporate money out of Alberta politics, let us really do it, completely, with no strange loopholes. I ask that all members vote for this very reasonable amendment and take away the ability of unions and corporations to finance political parties through loan guarantees.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise today and speak in support of this amendment. I support Bill 1, and Wildrose supports Bill 1. Wildrose believes in putting democracy back in the hands of Albertans. We believe in banning corporate and union donations, and this is an important step to do that.

Pay-to-play politics is the way that politics has been done in Alberta for quite a while now, and we want to put the power of democracy back in the hands of Albertans regardless of financial backing or ability to donate. We would like to suggest that there be no roundabout ways for unions and corporations to influence the political process by backstopping loans.

You've done a great job by adopting this policy of eliminating corporate and union donations, but you left loopholes. You've done only 50 per cent of the job: half. Half. Can you imagine me

as a paramedic providing half my skills and education when I'm treating a patient? What if I were to assess that patient, put on the heart monitor, give him some oxygen, start an intravenous line, you know, stabilize this patient, put him on my stretcher, get him in that ambulance and, once those doors are closed, kick back, relax because – you know what? – I've done half? I put on a good show for those folks out there. I'm not going to ply the pharmaceuticals. I'm not going to give electricity to reset that patient's heart. I'm just going to do half – 50 per cent – like this NDP government.

As a fire officer I was tasked with assessing and dictating a strategy to fight a house fire. I made sure that we positioned our pump in a strategic manner. I made sure that we had all the hose lines set up. We would ladder that building. We got all the boys there set out to attack this fire. We cordoned off the area. We set up rehab and medical stations. But we're not going to turn that hydrant on because we put a good show on for the public. It looks like we're doing something, 50 per cent, half.

Our team has identified several issues that need to be alleviated for this bill to truly protect the democratic process from the undue influence of unions and corporations. We only need to look at Ontario or even the United States to find issues. If you probe deep enough, you might even find that these loopholes are being used at the national level by our national parties. Can you imagine if there was a political party that leveraged things like property?

Mrs. Pitt: Shame.

Mr. Yao: Shame. Will this government recognize that these loopholes have been blatantly left in, or are they trying to match the previous government for suspicious decisions? If this government caucus were to approve such a bill with such blatant loopholes, they will demonstrate, every one of them, that they are not much different than previous governments.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to propose a subamendment, which we'll now have distributed.

The Chair: We'll take a moment while that's distributed, and this will be known as subamendment SA1.

Go ahead, hon. Minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to thank the hon. member for his amendment though it is unfortunate that he remains confused about the requirement that donation receipts state the date on which they were received. I am nonetheless glad to see that the members opposite are working hard to make this legislation and electoral financing better.

In response to his suggestions for an improvement I'm moving a subamendment to his amendment. This subamendment accepts clause (d) of part A, which limits interim loan payments by corporations and unions during the transition period to situations where the borrower is in default on their loan at the time of the payment. The transition provisions allow corporations and unions to make payments on loans that were taken out before June 15, 2015, without triggering penalties for an illegal contribution on the corporation or union. This is because otherwise the corporation or union may be punished for doing what they are legally required to do; i.e., pay back the guarantee. Limiting those loan payments made on or after June 15 to only those loans that are in default accomplishes that intent, and I thank the member for that.

8:50

The subamendment would strike out the other clauses in part A and all of part B for a couple of reasons. The legislation currently contains provisions for interim financing. We believe that corporations and unions should still be able to provide this safety net so long as the loan is paid back by the deadline. Second, there's no need to make those amendments to parts of Bill 1 that deal with guarantees. If a guarantee is needed, the political party, constituency association, candidate, or leadership contestant is already in default and needs the assistance; that is, the transitional ability to make good on a guarantee made prior to June 15, 2015, without triggering an illegal contribution does not need to be limited any further.

Madam Chair, I ask all members to support this subamendment, and again thank you to the hon. member for his hard work on this. Thank you.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. We are trying to be helpful. Wildrose campaigned on ending corporate and union donations, and this bill is important to us as well as to the government. We strongly believe that democracy belongs in the hands of all Albertans, not corporations and unions and, more to the point, their chequebooks. Albertans should feel, when their elected members are in Edmonton, that they will represent their views. We're encouraged to see the NDP propose an end to corporate and union donations. It's a great grassroots policy that the Wildrose believes in.

But for some reason this government did not go all the way to end union and corporate influence. There are massive loopholes that mean that with this bill we are not in fact ending corporate and union donations. Loopholes here allow unions to cover loans, in some cases without reporting them, and the in-kind donations loopholes mean that corporations or union bosses could donate their employees' time either by providing services, even at a phone bank or door-knocking, Madam Chair. We're hopeful that in the upcoming all-party subcommittee we'll see some clarity on what the government had in mind by leaving these loopholes available.

I still can't find a reason why this government would want unions to be able to backstop loans or lines of credit. The government has not provided any explanation as to why they would need such a loophole. What sort of circumstances is the NDP anticipating that they would want this option available to them?

Then there is a transitional provision that allows unions to pay off loans. Why would political parties not be paying off their own loans, Madam Chair?

There is also the issue of timing, which I really feel the government got wrong in making it retroactive to the middle of the election period.

Notwithstanding the arguments that the minister has made in the House and in the media, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, which I encourage her to read, does not require any party, constituency association, or candidate to give the date when they received a contribution. The law only requires them to disclose in which period the donation arrived. Again, we should have fixed that. Elections Alberta wanted us to fix that, and I have no idea why the government chose to avoid the fact of the current law.

If the NDP really wanted to return democracy to the hands of Albertans, these loopholes would be eliminated. We are grateful for the attempt they made, but we are interested in more than appearances, Madam Chair. It's not just the appearances of influence that we're concerned about; it's the likelihood that unions

and corporations will continue to play an important role in our politics.

We have tried to help in Committee of the Whole by offering suggestions, pointing out problems, and offering reasonable solutions. As is becoming increasingly clear, this government isn't as interested in listening or working together as they like to claim. In fact, they seem to be a lot like the old government. Well, they have at least acknowledged that this provision allowing unions and corporations to make loan payments sticks out like a sore thumb, and I am at least encouraged that they will work with us when we point out the most obvious problems with legislation. It's an improvement over the previous.

We will support this subamendment because it's better than the status quo, but we will be watching and waiting to make the necessary changes that my amendment would have brought in, either in four months, through the all-party committee, or in four years, when the Wildrose party forms the new government.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to address the House once more and the Committee of the Whole again on Bill 1. We've worked hard to make this important piece of legislation as strong as it can possibly be, but there hasn't been that much co-operation from the government as well as I could tell.

This subamendment is at least a little better or a little bit of a compromise from the government, and I'll hope that this is a sign of things to come, as we saw with last time's amendments. I hope the government doesn't pat itself on the back too hard for this subamendment, though, because it's pretty odd that they would have gone out of their way in the original version to ensure that corporations and unions can make loan payments for parties given that the bill is supposed to end their influence over parties. To be as clear as possible, Madam Chair, we're supporting the bill in principle. In the spirit of being helpful, we just wish we could have done more to ensure that the first bill we will pass this session serves the interests of Albertans in as robust a manner as possible.

Well, Madam Chair, could more be done? More co-operation would have been needed. Frankly, too many loopholes are remaining. The point here is to ban corporate and union donations during the contribution period. I hope we're all clear on that. We're not here trying to ban just certain types of contributions; we're banning all corporate and union contributions. At least, that's what the principle of this bill ought to have been aiming for. Albertans have made it abundantly clear that this is what they expect as well, and we want to help the government meet Albertans' expectations.

On the face of it the bill is trying to ban union and corporate donations, and the bill certainly takes it a lot of the way there, Madam Chair. Oh, maybe 50 per cent. We're getting close, but as it stands, it's not enough. Sure, we're banning direct donations, but we still leave the door wide open for indirect donations in the form of staffing hours and services rendered. If anything, the frequency of these kinds of donations will only increase once we've succeeded in banning direct donations. It will be the only means of influence open to corporations and union entities at this point.

Madam Chair, I fail to see the reason why the government would want to pass a bill with such gaping loopholes that would undermine the bill's entire purpose. It doesn't make any sense to me. To pass a bill with such shortcomings does not reflect well on the government that is sponsoring it. As I've said, though, we support the broad intent of the bill, and I'll be supporting it even though I wish there was more to be done to strengthen it. Wildrose will continue to press the government to correct these loopholes

allowing corporations, unions, and third parties to influence our elections.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I want to thank the opposition, particularly the Wildrose opposition, for their contributions to the debate on this bill and to re-emphasize what I said earlier, and that is that this bill was brought forward in a very short time frame. We need it to come forward, as hon. members know, in order to get approval to continue to write the cheques to keep the government operating because the previous government's authority to spend runs out at the end of this month. We also wanted to bring forward this bill, and of course the time frames were somewhat compressed. The Wildrose opposition is not acknowledging the fact that these are not complete, final products. There's going to be a budget in October, a full budget, and there will be a committee that will review all of these matters and may make recommendations for future changes.

So it's fine to say that the bill is not complete. That's your opinion, and that's a legitimate opinion. But to say that the government is deliberately leaving loopholes is most unfair, and I think the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre was very unfair to all members on this side of the House when he said that if we voted for this as it is, it was proof that we were no different than the previous government. That's not a fair statement. We have an intention of looking in some depth at democratic reform issues and openness and transparency in our governance in this province, and we look forward to working in partnership with all opposition parties, including the Wildrose, on that.

9:00

So I think, hon. members, with respect, that we intend to do more than this. That does not mean that we'll adopt everything that you've proposed. [interjection] It does not mean that. It does mean, however, that we will have time in order to collaborate, which we have not to this point had.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the subamendment?

If not, I will call the question on subamendment A1, as proposed by the hon. Minister of Justice.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on subamendment SA1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:01 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Piquette
Bilous	Jansen	Pitt
Ceci	Kazim	Renaud
Clark	Kleinsteinuber	Rosendahl
Cooper	Larivee	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Schmidt
Cyr	Loewen	Schneider
Dach	Loyola	Schreiner
Dang	Luff	Shepherd
Drever	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Ellis	Mason	Smith
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Starke
Fildebrandt	McIver	Sucha

Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	Swann
Ganley	McLean	Sweet
Goehring	McPherson	Taylor
Gray	Miller	Turner
Hanson	Miranda	van Dijken
Hinkley	Nielsen	Westhead
Hoffman	Nixon	Woollard
Horne	Orr	Yao

Totals:	For – 63	Against – 0
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[Motion on amendment SA1 carried unanimously]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Madam Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 32(3) I would ask that the division bells for the remainder of this session be shortened to one minute and ask for unanimous consent therefore.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: All right. Moving back to the amendment A3. Are there any further speakers to this amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: The question has been called.

[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

The Chair: We are now back on the bill, Bill 1. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to present an amendment to Bill 1. I'll wait to hand that out.

The Chair: We'll pause for a moment, hon. member, while you pass out the copies. It will be known as amendment A4.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I present this amendment to reduce the individual donation amount from \$15,000 to \$5,000. Bill 1 is a good start to the 29th Legislature sitting, but this amendment A4 offers us an opportunity to make what is, I think, a good bill a great bill. If we plan to ban corporation and union donations with the intent of getting money out of politics, let's do it for real. Fifteen thousand dollars is still a very significant sum of money and grants certain individuals – I will say that a very small percentage of Albertans have the wherewithal to donate \$15,000 to political parties and, in doing so, potentially can exert influence over government.

This reduces the risk as well, Madam Chair, of corporations or unions potentially granting large sums of money in the form of bonuses or payment combinations that could come from individuals while the money, in fact, comes from another source. Now, while this is, of course, against the current statute, there is still significant risk that happens when the donation threshold is at \$15,000 for individuals. It is still a significantly higher number than on the federal side and a significantly higher number than what we see in many other provinces.

As has been said before in this Chamber, democracy belongs to Albertans, real, actual Albertans, not to unions or corporations, and if we want to reduce the impact and influence that money can buy in politics, this is an opportunity to show Albertans that we are willing in this Chamber to lead.

Again, \$5,000 is still a substantial amount of money, and while I recognize and acknowledge that there will be a committee of the Legislature struck to discuss this, I believe that we are not going to unduly impact the operation of political parties currently if we reduce it to \$5,000. We have the opportunity here to take out the influence of money while still allowing political parties to function. Perhaps we'll look through the committee at lowering the limits even further. We'll have an opportunity through that to have a more comprehensive discussion about campaign finance reform, but for now this shows Albertans that we are willing to lead and willing to remove the influence of money not just from corporate donors and from unions but from wealthy individuals and reduce the impact and influence that has on our political system. This is a step to show Albertans that we do in fact care about campaign finance reform without providing too great a shock to the system for political parties.

This amendment, I submit, is a big step towards ensuring that democracy is, in fact, in the hands of Albertans, not corporations, unions, or wealthy individuals. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

9:20

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you very much, hon. member, for the amendment. In terms of saying that this legislation doesn't go far enough, I will tell you that the government absolutely agrees. This legislation was brought forward initially as a first step, as a first bill, to ban union and corporate donations. We absolutely agree that more amendments need to be made to this act, that further study is necessary, and there is a committee that will be doing that work.

At this moment I can tell you that the numbers for donations in different jurisdictions are wildly different. So we think that the best course of action in this case is to send this to the committee and to have the committee review it and to have them think about where the donation limits should be and make a proposal, and then we will move forward. But in terms of the spirit of the amendment we absolutely support you, so thank you very much.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Madam Chair. I rise to speak against this amendment. First, I would be surprised if my hon. colleagues on the government side of the House were to support this amendment. The reason I say that is that the Wildrose has brought forward three very reasonable amendments to strengthen Bill 1, and all of the Wildrose amendments were in keeping with the spirit of the bill as articulated by the Premier and her ministers. The Premier and every senior government official has made clear that the purpose of this bill is to remove union and corporate donations from political parties, to limit their influence on Alberta politics, and to put political power and influence back in the hands of everyday Albertans, where it belongs.

I completely support the spirit of Bill 1, and Wildrose completely supports the spirit of Bill 1. Each of the very reasonable amendments put forth has been voted down by the government despite being one hundred per cent focused on strengthening the spirit of the bill and removing obvious loopholes that went against the spirit of the bill, and we are all left to wonder why. However, in the case of the amendment now put forward for discussion by the hon. member, it appears that the amendment has very little to do with the actual intent of Bill 1, which is limiting corporation and union influence on our political process. This amendment that has been proposed by the hon. member has to do with the amounts that

an individual may donate to a political party and nothing to do with corporate or union donations.

So with due respect to my friend the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, this amendment, while it is certainly something that is reasonable to have a discussion on and something that we support in spirit, is not to the intent of Bill 1, which, of course, is to deal with banning corporate and union donations. An amendment to deal with the limits on an individual donation does not fit with the overall content of this bill. In our view, to adopt such an amendment without broad consultation of stakeholders and in view of the larger picture would be premature and irresponsible.

I'm actually a bit surprised the hon. member is even bringing forward this amendment because even in the context of our amendments, which were directly related to corporate and union donations, the member opposed them, saying that he believes the bill is not designed to do everything. The hon. member's argument at that time, Madam Chair, was that there was an opportunity to have a broader conversation about this in the all-party committee. In this case I would submit the same argument to the Member for Calgary-Elbow, that while I appreciate the issue he is trying to raise, it would be, in our view, more appropriate at the upcoming all-party committee and not as an add-on to this bill.

An amendment such as he proposes requires broader consultation with all stakeholders to ensure that we are getting it right, so I will not be voting in support.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Madam Chair. I rise perplexed because I, too, want to see these same kind of initiatives move quickly. Obviously, the \$15,000 limit for donations in a nonelection year and the \$30,000 donation limit in an election year are way too high if we care about getting money out of democracy. I've said in many quarters that we have the best democracy money can buy, and I think that's part of why we're doing what we're doing. I would have said that we should harmonize what we're doing here in terms of contribution limits with the federal government, which is a thousand dollars a year from individuals and no corporate or union donations.

I share some of the concerns of my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre that this may not be the correct vehicle to make those changes, but I think all of us are anxious to see movement. If it's possible, it would be nice to see some limits. We all know that we have to reduce the limits. There's no reason why we shouldn't move forward on harmonizing the provincial donation limits with the federal limits, and then everybody knows the rules all across the country. It's so much simpler, so much more in the interests of democracy.

I guess the question is: what's the appropriate venue? Given that this bill is truly about eliminating corporate and union donations, it's a difficult fit. But I do hope and I do encourage this government to move quickly on the donation limits. Otherwise we're faced with the same problem as we had with individuals like Daryl Katz in the last few years, who was able to make big donations through his family members and his board members.

I'll leave it there. I support the spirit, but I can't support the amendment.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment?

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: All right. We're back on Bill 1. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments to Bill 1?

Are you ready for the question?

Mr. Mason: Yes. Call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mr. Mason: Madam Chairman, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

The Chair: The committee shall now rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Feehan: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 1. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 3. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 1

An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta

Ms Ganley: Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta.

This bill will amend the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act to ban corporations and unions from making political donations in our province. For too long a small segment of the population had undue influence on Alberta's political parties, but with this bill, Madam Speaker, Albertans are given back their rights as citizens in a democratic society, something very important to the Premier and to this government.

9:30

An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta will change the election financing rules so that only residents of Alberta, not corporations and unions, will be allowed to make political contributions to political parties, constituency associations, candidates for election and senatorial election, and leadership contestants. If enacted, it will become effective as of June 15, 2015, the day the bill was first introduced in this House. It will level the playing field and inject much-needed equity and fairness into election financing in Alberta. Politicians will need to pay attention to Albertans and their issues instead of focusing on the priorities of those with the deepest pockets.

We have consulted with the Chief Electoral Officer about our proposed amendments. We've also had a lot of positive feedback on these changes, both from Albertans and from a number of the hon. members in this House. We've listened to that feedback. Madam Speaker, this government is willing and eager to work with other political parties represented in this House. We're open to

ideas for improvement, and we're willing to accept them when they make sense.

This evening we were pleased to support a portion of the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, which will adjust an aspect of the bill regarding loans. This change to Bill 1 further limits when corporations and unions can make direct payment on loans during the transition period, made on or after June 15, 2015. Now loan payments on loans taken out prior to June 15, 2015, can only be made without triggering the illegal-contribution rules in cases where the borrower is in default on their loan at the time the payments are made, on or after June 15. This change to Bill 1 places stricter guidelines on when corporations and unions can make direct payments on loans during the transition period but still ensures that unions and corporations are not penalized for complying with pre-existing obligations.

Madam Speaker, this bill is just our first step towards fulfilling our campaign promise to improve democracy, accountability, and transparency. It does not include every possible change that could have been made, but it doesn't mean we're not going to make more improvements in the future. We've proposed a joint special legislative committee to review Alberta's elections and make recommendations that will cover all aspects of the electoral process. That review will take time, especially if we want a vigorous and thorough review, which is why we have proposed these initial changes to electoral financing.

Madam Speaker, I'm proud that this is the first piece of legislation our government has brought before you, legislation that will renew democracy and help to ensure that individuals can be confident that their concerns are being represented in this Legislative Assembly. I ask all the members for their support of me and this bill in moving to third reading.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Throughout the debate on Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, Wildrose has been abundantly clear. We are in support of eliminating corporate and union donations and getting big money and big labour out of politics. We believe that the power of democracy is best served when it's in the hands of the individual voters. Wildrose has stated for a very long time that there needs to be an end to big business and organized labour bearing undue influence on politics and having an unfair advantage when it comes to funding elections.

Finally we have a government that has taken action. Well, sort of, Madam Speaker. Getting rid of corporate and union donations is long overdue. It's a great first step, but just like the government before them, it is only a half a step forward. Just like the government before them, they take a Wildrose policy straight from our campaign platform, write it into law, and then only take it halfway. I don't know about the hon. members across the way, but I didn't come here to do half a job.

This government has decided that big unions should still be able to fund campaigns in backhanded ways. Wildrose has fought against this through every step of the debate, and we're not going to stop now. When we say that we want to get big money out of politics, we mean it. We don't say it and then use it as a half measure to make it look like we're doing something.

This government has gone halfway, and we support them for that. I'm glad to vote in favour of this, and I do so in recognition that this is a great first step. If it takes four years to finish the job, then I'm

proud to do so when Wildrose forms the next government. I just wish it wouldn't take that long.

My colleague and my friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake brought forward some smart and logical amendments, Madam Speaker. Unfortunately, the government just smacked them down without due thought or process. As my friend from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills pointed out ever so elegantly last week, it seems like orange really is the new blue. This isn't the kind of change that Albertans voted for. Albertans voted for a new way of doing things and an end to politics as usual. Albertans thought that both the Wildrose and the NDP were in favour of eliminating corporate and union donations. I don't think they thought that the NDP's commitment was just an empty campaign promise. When Wildrose makes a commitment, we mean it. Maybe it's just the new politician in me, but I hoped that the new government was going to stand by their commitments, too.

I think that the debate surrounding Bill 1, Madam Speaker, is going to be an indicator of things to come. I think it means that we now have a government that is more concerned with window dressing than with actually seeing results. I want that side of the House to prove me wrong. I hope they will.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will offer this in closing. Let us measure twice and cut once. Often throughout debate the minister said that this was only the start and that more was coming related directly to corporate and union donations. What I don't understand is why she doesn't want to get the entire job done at once. In the future, when we debate legislation and the government brings it forward, I hope we can get it right the first time. If not, that's all right. Wildrose will finish the job in four years.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak to Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, in third reading. This is, of course, a fundamentally important piece of legislation, and I'm so proud that our party has been able to lead the introduction of this absolutely foundational improvement to our system of democracy in this province.

You know, I just want to respond to a couple of points that have been made. I can't go as far back as, well, one member, anyway, in terms of the history lesson, but I can say that I was elected in 2008, and in 2008 one of the fundamental campaign platform promises that we made, our party, the NDP, was to ban corporate and union donations. Now, you know, I don't want to be a stickler about history, but I'm pretty sure the Wildrose didn't exist then. Unless you've entered a whole new space-time continuum, I think you really, truly have to rethink this notion that the idea was yours and we took it because, in fact, that is not the case. It's been a long-standing position of our party for, in fact, years and years and decades that we get corporate and union donations out of our electoral system.

The reason for that, Madam Speaker, is because we know that when you give the power to donate and to support whatever political party people believe in and believe represents their issues, when you give that power to individual human beings, who happen to often be individual voters, then, in fact, you make your democratic system far more accountable and far more representative. So we're very, very pleased to be leading this change here in Alberta.

Now, as for a number of the points that I've already heard made tonight about how this could be improved, be very clear, Madam Speaker, that it is absolutely our intention to move forward on a

whole range of issues that have already been raised tonight and previous nights in debate.

9:40

One of the things that we thought was really important, though, because this is a piece of legislation that impacts not just folks on this side of the House but also folks on that side of the House and even folks in that corner of the House, because it impacts all of us, was that we should refer the matter to a special all-party standing committee so that everybody could have impact. So rather than, you know, taking potshots about window dressing and all that kind of thing, we actually thought that it would be worthwhile for us to be able to, as a group on an all-party basis, take the time to consider all the issues that arise when you start opening up the Election Act and the election financing act.

You know, we've had a number of issues already raised. We've had issues about: well, what's a donation; what's an in-kind donation; how much should be donated; how much should people be allowed to spend; when should they be allowed to spend; when should the government be allowed to advertise vis-à-vis and in relation to an election; should an election be an election season, or should it be an election day in terms of whether it's fixed? There are so many great ideas that I think we can all bring to the table that will ultimately improve our democratic system not just for folks over here but for folks over there and, most importantly, for folks outside of this building.

So that's why I'm so proud of the fact that we're going to make one of our first acts be an opportunity for that very open conversation in a very open and transparent platform, and I'm sorry that that process disappoints the member from the Official Opposition, but I actually think that it's something that's good for all Albertans. I'm very proud of the process that we put in place. I'm very proud of Bill 1. I'm very proud of the foundational change that it already makes to our democratic system here in Alberta, and as I've said, I'm very proud that that change comes as a result of the work of this NDP government.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers with respect to the bill?

If not, then we will call the vote on Bill 1 in third reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:43 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Notley
Bhullar	Jansen	Orr
Bilous	Jean	Piquette
Ceci	Kazim	Pitt
Clark	Kleinstaub	Renaud
Cooper	Larivee	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Sabir
Cyr	Loewen	Schmidt
Dach	Loyola	Schreiner
Dang	Luff	Shepherd
Drever	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Ellis	Mason	Smith
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Starke
Fildebrandt	McIver	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Sweet

Ganley	McLean	Taylor
Goehring	McPherson	Turner
Gray	Miller	van Dijken
Hanson	Miranda	Westhead
Hinkley	Nielsen	Woollard
Hoffman	Nixon	Yao
Horne		

Totals: For – 64 Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 1 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

Bill 3
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2)

The Chair: Hon. members, we have under consideration in committee Bill 3, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2). Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Mrs. Pitt: Eighteen billion dollars is a lot of money. Most of us were sent here with the hopes that things in Edmonton would change, that the old way of doing business in politics would be over. Voters hoped for transparency, a government and opposition that would be accountable to the people. I for one will never forget that. I never thought I would long for the days where budgets were more transparent, longing for a fulsome debate over specifics of a budget, yet here we are. Even a complete document would be nice. Ministers providing three lines on how they intend to spend billions of dollars. “Just wait. Hold on. It’s coming.” I just can’t imagine that that is transparent. That is not accountable. That’s reckless. That is someone else’s money. People work really hard and send money to Edmonton, happy to provide programs and services that help our fellow Albertans out. I know that I wish I had details on the budget. I bet most Albertans do, too.

The thing with this budget is that it doesn’t have much of a mandate. In fact, the past two Premiers that attempted to pass this budget are now former Premiers, looking for a mandate, too. I’m not sure I’d want to be counted amongst those distinguished people.

I’m as keen as the next Albertan to see the financials. I want this taken seriously. It is billions of dollars. I’m all for giving this government enough time to get up to speed on their portfolios. I’m sure it’s a big job. It’s been months. It snowed when this government won, and it’s looking like it will be snowing again by the time this government gets their numbers together. And I think, more importantly to this government, the federal election will be long over by the time we see a budget.

Albertans voted out the last party that played politics with our money. We want to help. I’d be more than happy to help with whatever over there to see where the money is going. What can I do to help? It’s a serious question.

We want this budget brought forward in September. That seems like more than enough time. Does this government even know when the budget will be brought forward? December? October? January? Does it matter as long as the federal NDP are done trolling for votes around here? At the very least fully debating this budget would be helpful. Give the ministers a chance to speak to where the money is going, where the spending is going. Assure Albertans that this

government is being open and honest about where their tax dollars are going.

We’re very disappointed that we have no idea about what the true state of Alberta’s finances are a full week after this budget was introduced. Albertans deserve to know how much we are taking in to pay for nearly six months of government spending. They deserve to know how much we are borrowing, how much interest is siphoning funds away from core government services, and they deserve to know how the government plans to fund all their new spending.

10:00

In the election the Wildrose was clear about our financial plan. It was realistic, attainable, and modest. It put forward a reasonable solution to reduce the size of the most expensive government in Canada: make it more about the people served, not the dollars spent. The government’s plan, instead, is to make government grow faster than they can tax Albertans, which just isn’t fair or realistic. We will keep fighting to clear the air on this minibudget and stand up for Albertans demanding better, more transparent government.

The Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Chair. As many of the previous speakers on this bill have mentioned in the past, it’s a shame that we’re debating such a large amount of money, \$18 billion – I mean, wow – in such a rushed, short period of time. Last week the government announced some details about the spending in four areas. These areas include education, health, human services, and advanced education. For education there is more funding to meet student growth and to restore reductions planned by the previous government to areas such as English language learners and funding for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. Part of the intended money was for Human Services for investments in child intervention, FCSS increases, and increased shelter beds for women. Finally, the government announced funding for postsecondary institutions. This funding will go to colleges and universities across Alberta for an immediate tuition freeze. The other commitment for postsecondary institutions is funding to reverse market modifiers that were approved by the last government in December.

In December the PC government approved 25 market modifiers to allow tuition increases in mostly specialized and professional programs across the province, programs like law and business. It’s my understanding that this bill will add an additional \$40 million this year for postsecondary institutions, but the details of the plan for Alberta’s systems are not yet clear. Wildrose policy when it comes to tuition is to limit tuition increases to the rate of inflation every year. We certainly agree that a postsecondary education should be accessible to all students, and this means making sure that tuition increases don’t rise at a rate that makes a good education out of reach.

At the same time, we also need to be sure that our whole system is sustainable. The NDP promise to reverse all the market modifier increases is a bit of a problem because it was a decision that didn’t take each different circumstance into account. Our postsecondary institutions need a plan for sustainability more than they need a quick injection of cash.

Athabasca University is facing a serious issue when it comes to sustainability. It is a university that has 40,000 online and distance education students, many in Alberta but also a large number in Canada and other countries, and is struggling for sustainability. I’d like to know the government’s plan for supporting our whole

postsecondary system. Bill 3 adds spending before there has been a chance to discuss details of the money. They are spending even faster than they can tax.

Postsecondary education in Alberta needs good planning. For years the ministry has struggled to streamline and find better ways to direct our public institutions. The Campus Alberta model has been presented as the answer, but confusion and overlap in direction has been an ongoing problem. It's frustrating to see the new government come in and request additional funding right away but be unable to provide concrete details for the spending or to answer the question: where are the additional funds coming from?

It's certainly reasonable to support the spending outlined in Bill 3 on the face of it, but we are being asked here to consider legislation quickly, with a shortage of detail about the spending and knowing that there is so much work to be done evaluating programs, services as they now stand.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to take this opportunity to perhaps ask some questions of the Premier. We live in a situation where our single largest cost pressure is that of wages. We have a number of contracts that are in place that require continuous increases, yet about 20 per cent of our contracts are up for renewal every single year. This is a question I posed last week to ministers as well. In this year about 20 per cent of the government's contracts with public-sector unions and other partners are going to be up for renewal. Within this five-month period that you are seeking interim supply for, what is your plan to deal with those specific negotiations? How do you plan on curbing these expenditures? Do you foresee yourselves going to the bargaining table seeking zero per cent increases in this approximately 20 per cent of contract renewals that are coming up during this year, or do you see yourselves going to the negotiating table by presenting raises of whatever magnitude, 2, 3, 4, 5 per cent? We'll start with that.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question, hon. member. I am in charge of that area within my ministry. The officials have briefed me several times, but they've not identified any ongoing bargaining that's taking place right now that I need to be aware of or address. I will be continuing to work with officials, obviously, within the ministry, but they've not identified that as a pressure point that I need to expend time on in these 30 days that I've been here. I will be, of course, here over the summer with regard to budget preparations, and issues that come up in that period of time will be addressed within the full budget, that we'll be bringing back in the fall.

Ms Hoffman: If I might supplement, Madam Chair, I just want to thank the hon. member for the question and to say that, of course, it would be irresponsible for us to talk about negotiation strategies prior to actually being part of the negotiation table. Having been on both sides of the table, we'll be happy to finalize and bring information forward once negotiations are complete, but I think it would not be wise for the employer to be talking about opening offers, potentially, in this venue.

Mr. Bhullar: I want to first of all start by saying that I really appreciate the frankness of the Finance minister last week and this week. Minister, I appreciate, you know, you breaking down the budget in very simple format. I don't think we agree that the numbers all add up, but you've provided us with a basis. Now, I would ask you, though, to go back to your officials because in any

given year approximately 20 per cent of negotiations occur with a wide range of our partners. It doesn't mean that the government of Alberta is directly negotiating with these folks. It could be our postsecondary partners that have union negotiations that are ongoing.

To the Minister of Health. Minister, I absolutely agree that you shouldn't be talking about all of your strategy in public, but you need a broad policy objective, and you should have some accounting for that within this budget – a five-month period is a very large period – in which you establish some very clear frameworks. Now, whether you disagree with us is fine, but we did provide a very clear understanding to our public-sector partners and our unions. We said: "Listen. Contracts that are signed we obviously have to live up to, but on a go-forward basis Alberta does not have the money, Alberta does not have the resources to be able to give you 2, 3, 4, or 5 per cent. It's just not in the cards. It's just not feasible."

10:10

These are really important pieces. Now, I don't remember the date, but in your department, Minister of Health, you will have a very significant negotiation ongoing with the nurses. I think this is a wonderful opportunity for you to provide us with some insight on the strategy within this next five-month period on how you plan on moving forth in negotiations and preliminary discussions with nurses. If I remember correctly, negotiations were supposed to start later this year – again, I'm going by memory – because the contract is up next year if I remember correctly.

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. Bhullar: Somebody from the other side yelled no, so perhaps he was a member of that bargaining unit before. I would remind the member that he obviously will need to clear such issues with the Ethics Commissioner.

But there are 20 per cent of our union negotiations that take place in any given year. Madam Premier, if I remember correctly – I'm going by memory – there'll be a number of postsecondaries. If you would ask your ministers to go and take a look, your postsecondary partners will have negotiations ongoing with their unions today, right?

These are all really important pieces, and within a five-month period – you're asking us to vote on billions of dollars here – we'd like to know what the strategy is. We'd like to know how many dollars are going towards that. Or are we just walking around saying: "You know what? We'll deal with all other issues later. Let's make sure we sign some new contracts"? I think that's a very, very important, relevant discussion that we need to be having because the fact is that I don't foresee our revenue pie growing very much.

You know, RBC and the Conference Board of Canada are two of the latest people to step up and say: we think Alberta is going to be in a recession this year. In recessionary periods your resource revenues are already coming down. You have business taxes that are not going to produce the types of results they did before. We have a lot of expenditures, a lot more options, and I don't think we really have a lot of new spending restraints that are coming in.

To the Finance minister or the Premier or the Minister of Health: just as, you know, with some of the other unanswered questions that we have – we have a commitment from the Government House Leader that he'll provide us with written answers – can we get a commitment from you to take a look and see which negotiations, which contracts are coming up for renewal in this year? As I said, they can be your partners, our partners in the public sector. We just want a commitment that you'll tell us which ones are coming up

and how you plan on dealing with those within this period of five months. Is that a commitment we can get from you?

Mr. Ceci: I would like to say that compensation for the public sector accounts for about \$24 billion of the 48 or so billion dollars that the provincial budget is, so it's pretty substantial. Thank you for raising that.

In June 2014, about a year ago, the government of Alberta ratified an agreement with its unionized employees, as you will probably remember, resulting in a 2 per cent wage increase in 2014, 2.25 in 2015, and 2.5 in 2016. Now, that takes us all the way through '16. The terms of that agreement were also extended to management and opted-out employees. So we've got a big number of employees, both opted-out and unionized, covered through 2016.

The Chair: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but under Standing Order 64(4) the chair of the Committee of the Whole shall forthwith "put a single question proposing the approval of every appropriation Bill then standing referred to the committee, which shall be decided without debate or amendment, and the committee shall [forthwith] rise and report."

Pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) I must now put the following question: does the committee approve the following bill, Bill 3, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2)?

[The voice vote indicated that Bill 3 was approved]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:15 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Kazim	Notley
Ceci	Kleinsteuber	Piquette
Clark	Larivee	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Dach	Loyola	Sabir
Dang	Luff	Schmidt
Drever	Malkinson	Schreiner
Feehan	Mason	Shepherd
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Sigurdson
Ganley	McKitrick	Sucha
Goehring	McLean	Sweet
Gray	McPherson	Turner
Hinkley	Miller	Westhead
Hoffman	Miranda	Woollard
Horne	Nielsen	

10:20

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Pitt
Bhullar	Jansen	Smith
Cooper	Jean	Starke
Cyr	Loewen	Taylor
Ellis	McIver	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Nixon	Yao

Hanson

Totals: For – 44 Against – 19

[Motion carried]

The Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) the committee shall now immediately rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Woollard: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 3.

Thank you.

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 2

An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue

Mr. Ceci: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 2, an Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue, 2015. On May 5 Albertans have voted for change, and this government is proud to announce that this bill delivers on key commitments we made during that election campaign. Our plan restores fairness and balance to Alberta's taxation system, it provides the government with stable and secure revenues to protect the quality of life we all enjoy, and it keeps us globally competitive as a great place to live and do business. Over the coming months our government will be putting together a full fiscal plan, a fiscal plan built upon the premise that everyone contributes fairly. Our shift to a progressive income tax system puts us back in line with the rest of the country, all provinces and territories, while still maintaining the most competitive tax system in the country and asks those who do better to help build a fairer and more equitable society for everyone.

As I mentioned at the first reading, the bill has two distinct components that accomplish these ends. The second part of the proposed bill is to introduce greater progressivity to the province's personal income tax system. This will include the creation of five new tax brackets with implementation beginning October 1, 2015.

Madam Speaker, it's important to note that 93 per cent of Alberta taxpayers will not be impacted by these PIT changes and only the top income earners pay a little bit more. It's important to note that even with these changes, Alberta's earning exemptions will still remain the highest in the country, meaning that Albertans will retain the most before they have to start paying provincial income tax. Albertans will continue to pay the lowest overall taxes when compared to other provinces.

Madam Speaker, this revenue is much-needed. It will ensure long-term, stable funding for health care, education, and other important programs and services.

Madam Speaker, I'm also proud that we are making a more affordable Alberta for everyone with the additional changes to the fee structures in the province. I announced last week that we'll be following through on our campaign commitments to eliminate the health care levy; to eliminate user fees on marriage, birth, and death certificates; and to eliminate vehicle and licensing fees. These fees and regressive levies, which would have made it harder for families to make ends meet, are not going to be followed through with. All Albertans will benefit by the rollbacks that would have gone in place and affected families on so many of these basic services.

The first part of the proposed bill is to increase the corporate income tax rate from 10 per cent to 12 per cent effective July 1, 2015. Through our plan small businesses will continue to enjoy a 3 per cent rate. But today we're asking corporations who have long

benefited from our exceptionally low tax rates to contribute a little more to support a better quality of life for all Albertans.

Madam Speaker, even with this change businesses, including small businesses, will still enjoy an overall competitive advantage in Alberta when compared with other provinces because there's no sales tax, there's no payroll tax, there are no health premiums, and we have the lowest fuel tax in Canada.

Our government is committed to working with businesses to promote jobs and diversify our economy. Over the coming months we'll be preparing a budget, and I've already begun and my colleagues have already begun productive conversations with business leaders about how best to support growth in our economy. This government is committed to ensuring that Alberta will continue to be globally competitive and an attractive option for investors thanks to its infrastructure, cities, educated population, and investment opportunities.

Madam Speaker, this is much-needed revenue that will ensure long-term, stable funding for health care, education, and other important programs and services. My colleagues who are the ministers of Health, Education, Human Services, and Advanced Education have already spoken clearly about what this means for Albertans. I'm very proud of the excellent work that they have done in reinvesting in the core services that Albertans depend on.

Bill 2 gives all Albertans more opportunities, opportunities that were going to be squandered by the previous government. Bill 2 allows us to reverse cuts to health care and invest in stable, predictable funding for the vital public services that matter most to Albertans. It allows us to invest in schools and ensure that students get the education they deserve. It allows us to immediately freeze tuition at postsecondary institutions across Alberta so that all of our

youth have an opportunity to succeed and so that we can build an educated population. Finally, Bill 2 allows us to strengthen services to the most vulnerable in our communities and help them lead more successful lives.

Madam Speaker, these changes will return Alberta to a stable tax system with a steady stream of revenue to support our vital public services while maintaining our province's overall tax advantage. Our province will continue to be a great place to do business. As the Premier has made clear, in the coming budget we will outline new initiatives to build and diversify our economy. In all, we are responsibly ensuring that all families have access to the important services they need like health, education, and social services. This is the fair thing to do, and it's what Albertans elected us to do. I'd encourage all members on both sides of the House to support this bill, and I look forward to discussing it with you further.

Madam Speaker, with this I'd like to adjourn debate for tonight. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister has moved to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, we've had a very productive day. I want to thank all members for their contribution. I think we've had excellent debate on a number of very important issues for the future of the province. I would suggest that we call it a day, so I'll move that we adjourn now until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:29 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Other inquiries:

Managing Editor
Alberta Hansard
1001 Legislature Annex
9718 – 107 St.
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E4
Telephone: 780.427.1875