



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, December 4, 2017

Day 60

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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

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

Party standings:

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

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Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 4, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let each of us pray or reflect, each in our own way.

Dr. Albert E. Hohol

December 27, 1922, to November 17, 2017

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we pay tribute to a former member of this Assembly who has recently passed away. Dr. Albert Hohol was elected as the Progressive Conservative member for Edmonton-Belmont in 1971 and was re-elected in 1975. Dr. Hohol earned his bachelor of education in 1950 and his master of education in 1954, both from the University of Alberta, and his PhD from the University of Oregon in 1967.

After his teaching career progressed, he rose to the position of associate superintendent, educational administration, for the Edmonton public school board in 1969. He then turned to provincial politics and served in the cabinet his entire tenure. Dr. Hohol held the portfolios of Minister of Labour from 1971 to 1972, minister of manpower and labour from 1972 to 1975, and minister of advanced education and manpower from 1975 to 1979. In his last portfolio he advocated for the creation and ongoing support of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta. Dr. Hohol passed away on November 17, 2017, at the age of 94.

In a moment of silence I would ask that you remember Dr. Hohol as you may have known him.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. I would invite all to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, with our admiration and respect, there is gratitude to members of the families who shared the burdens of public office and public service. Today I would like to welcome members of the family of Dr. Hohol who are present in the Speaker's gallery. Please rise as I call your names: Ms Barb Oberg and Mr. Ted Prebushewski. Hon. members, if you would express your appreciation to the family members of Dr. Hohol.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to remind everyone that we have a very busy day, and I would encourage each and every one of

you to keep your introductions as brief as possible.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of outstanding individuals who are here today celebrating Human Rights Day at the Legislature with us. I would like them to stand as I call their names: Karen Lee Gall, Jim Gurnett, Austin Mardon, Catherine Mardon, Chevi Rabbit, and Muriel Stanley Venne. Please, let's give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you today and to this Assembly members of the electricity and sustainable energy division in my ministry. These folks serve Albertans very well with all their hard work. In their division they've been helping to launch the renewable electricity program and transition to a more sustainable market system for Alberta's future. I'd ask them to rise as I call their names: Brent Kelly, Chelsea Donelon, Christine Armitage, Christopher Ewert, Ewa Kultys, Helaina Zyp, Isabelle Vouvé, John Ferrera, Kimberly Budd, Sandy Lee, and Scott Crawford. I'd ask them to stand and members to join me in welcoming my staff.

The Speaker: Welcome.

An oversight: school groups first, hon. members.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a number of students, some of the hardest working and smartest students in the whole province of Alberta, who are visiting us from the humble constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, those being the students of Forest Heights elementary school. They're accompanied by their teacher, Frau Marion Fritz, and some parent chaperones, Alexander Brunnée and Brian Salisbury. It should be noted that Forest Heights offers a German-English bilingual program, and in recognition of that, I have saved up some of my heckles in both English and in German this afternoon. I'd ask that the students please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Darby Young and Amy Stevens with Level Playing Field Inc. Darby visited us on Thursday. She's back again today with Amy in commemoration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Amy runs the office and is known as the amazing Amy at Level Playing Field. I'd ask now that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly guests who are also here celebrating Human Rights Day. Seated in your gallery are Roxanne Felix-Mah, Joel French, Jill Green, Harchand Grewal, Charan Khehra, and Hai Nguyen. I'd ask my guests to stand – I thank them for all the hard work that they do – and that we give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly guests who are here today for Human Rights Day: Alphonse Ndem Ahola, Cynthia Palmaria, Harriet Tinka, and Xiang Zhang. This year Human Rights Day also commemorates the 50th anniversary of the international covenant on economic, social, and cultural rights and the international covenant on civil and political rights. I thank my guests for celebrating this day with us and ask them now to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly guests who are here today also celebrating Human Rights Day at the Legislature. They remind us of the importance of human rights in our own lives and that every person is entitled to human dignity and worth. Here today are Fakhra Abrar, Lorna Dancey, Gary Hansen, and Blake Loates. If you four would all stand, I would thank you all for your work and ask you to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

1:40

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you guests who are here today celebrating the annual event of Human Rights Day at the Legislature. Later today I will speak more about Human Rights Day and the importance of a common standard of equal dignity and worth for all people. My guests here today are Susan Dut, Tammy Kaglik, Shahriyar Khan, and Jonathan Robb. I'd ask them now to please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three of my favourite constituents. Two of them were too young to vote for me. One probably did, but she is my wife. I guess there's no way to know for sure. But it's good to see Tiffany Nixon – I'd ask if she would stand up – and our twins Austin and Chyanne, who have been guests in this House many times, but they've never seen it quite this way. Most of this last year they've seen their dad in unity town halls across all of central Alberta and then on a leadership race all across central Alberta. So I say to them through you: "Here it is. We united. Thanks for all your help, and thanks for being here." Please give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. You must be a very patient wife.

The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a group of 19 from the United Steelworkers who are here with us today. The United Steelworkers is Canada's most diverse union, proudly representing workers from a number of fields, from steel mills to health care, social services to telecommunications.

As well, we are joined by two other people very important to me. First, my mother-in-law, Dr. Bette Gray, has been an educator all her career, an award-winning teacher. I've been very honoured to have Bette in my life and am very happy she's here to join us. She is joined by Edna Dach. Edna is also an award-winning educator and innovator. In fact, there are now awards named after her that are being given out. She's an inspiration to me personally and, I know, to all who know her.

If I could have all my guests stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly this year's inductees into the 4-H Alberta Hall of Fame, Linda Gooch and Sylvia Mathon. Linda Gooch has been a 4-H leader and volunteer for more than 25 years in many roles, including district key leader and on the Provincial Equine Advisory Committee. The late Sylvia Mathon was a 4-H parent, leader, and volunteer with a passion for family, youth, and agriculture. Sadly, Sylvia passed away in 2016, and her presence will be sorely missed by her 4-H family. Linda and her family as well as a member of Sylvia's family are here today, including two-and-a-half-month-old Rebecca. I'd like to ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a group of medical students who are here from the universities of Alberta and Calgary. They're seated in the members' gallery. Each year a group of students from both programs visits the Legislature to meet with MLAs and share their ideas about health care. I look forward to meeting with them later today. I now invite Howie, Kaylin, Angela, Adom, and their colleagues to please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly several organizations. To start, the Victims of Homicide of Edmonton Support Society. The Victims of Homicide Society was founded in 1995 by Noel and Joyce Farion following the murder of their son. I've attended several of their meetings, and I can say that it's a profoundly emotional experience first-hand. The group provides ongoing emotional support to help people deal with the pain of their tragic loss and to help them slowly rebuild their lives one day at a time.

They are joined by representatives from both CDI College and UFCW local 401: Lori Kapler and Renata Maione from CDI College as well as Charmaine St. Germain and Sheena Thomson from UFCW. They're joined by my constituency manager, Maria-Elizabeth Vicente. All of them along with 16 of my colleagues' offices work to make the UFCW local 401's third annual shoe drive a success, and I'll be discussing that later in my member's statement.

I would like to ask all of my guests now to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly representatives of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Joining us today are the following members: Cam Tait, Neil Pierce, Regan Treewater-Lipes, and Darby Lee Young as well as Darby's assistant, Amy Stevens. I'm pleased to have them here today in honour of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Our government was proud to appoint 15 new members to the Premier's council for the first time in years, led by Chair Sheila Serup and the deputy chair, my colleague the MLA for St. Albert. I appreciate having an incredible group of individuals on this council and look forward to working with them. I ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Sabir: I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly ambassadors for the CommuniTea Infusion project and Skills Society who are visiting us today in honour of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Skills Society is one of the largest disability rights and service organizations in the Edmonton area, with a 40-year history of supporting over 400 people with disabilities in the Edmonton area. Skills Society is a valued partner of my ministry and is known locally and nationally as an organization that lives and breathes innovation in order to help people with disabilities live full lives in the community.

One of their innovations is called CommuniTea Infusion project, which converted a 1972 Volkswagen bus into a tea house that travels to Edmonton neighbourhoods, creating and strengthening community relationships. This is an innovative employment program, and I wish to congratulate all participants on its success. Joining us today are Paige Reeves, Larry James, Emily Hannem, Momo Yekee, Chris Bruce, and Shelby Larson. I ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ministerial Statements

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

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, December 3, I was pleased to join millions of people around the world to celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This is an important day to recognize the valuable contributions of persons with disabilities in our communities. Disability is not inability. Every day across our province individuals with disabilities are making incredible contributions and building stronger communities. The International Day of Persons with Disabilities is an important opportunity to celebrate these remarkable accomplishments and promote inclusion in all our communities.

This day is also a call to action. While much has changed since the day was first proclaimed in 1993, many issues and barriers continue to face individuals with disabilities. These issues are important to our government and to me personally. Before I was elected, I worked at the Salvation Army. I have seen how important it is to have reliable public services for individuals with disabilities and their families.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that is focused on taking action to make life better for Albertans with disabilities. Instead of making reckless cuts, we are protecting and

improving the supports Albertans with disabilities count on. Since we were elected, we have increased funding for PDD by \$55 million so that more individuals and families have access to support. We have increased funding for AISH by \$93 million and released the AISH action plan to make improvements. We have stopped regressive and dehumanizing policies that hurt Albertans with disabilities.

One of the things I'm most proud of was repealing the safety standard regulation in its entirety. This was a damaging regulation that was imposed on the community without much consultation, and the community told us loud and clear that it had to go. I was proud to remove the supports intensity scale, that people with developmental disabilities called invasive and dehumanizing.

It has been a source of pride and a profound privilege to do this work, but I know there is more work that needs to be done. Individuals, families, and advocates have had to wait for real action for so many years, and I know it sometimes feels like improvements aren't being made fast enough.

1:50

That is why we are creating the first disability advocate in Alberta's history, someone who will represent the rights, interests, and views of persons with varying abilities, with a view to improving programs and services available to them. We look forward to sharing the job posting soon. We are also making AISH more accessible and user friendly and will be releasing new application forms and a user-friendly guide for Albertans later this month.

Mr. Speaker, we are doing this work in collaboration with many incredible individuals, advocates, and organizations who are working diligently to make life better for persons with varying abilities. Over the next week several Albertans are being recognized with awards for their outstanding leadership. Awards are being presented in communities throughout the province by members of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, a council that we were so proud to appoint 15 incredible advocates to this past year.

I'm so proud that Alberta not only promotes but embraces and celebrates inclusion and diversity. I want to recognize all award winners for their incredible work. I also want to recognize all individuals with disabilities, their families, advocates, and front-line workers for the work they do to make life better for Albertans each and every day.

Mr. Speaker, we are here, we are listening, and we are committed to working with all concerned to build an even stronger and more inclusive Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would propose to continue with the response from the Official Opposition, and then we will move to Oral Question Period.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so honoured to rise today in the Assembly to celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and to celebrate the enrichment that people with disabilities provide world-wide. In 1992 the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed December 3 as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities to promote equality, inclusion, and the empowerment of persons with disabilities and to highlight the obstacles that they still face in society. To date this convention on the rights of persons with disabilities has 160 signatories to the convention, 92 signatories to the optional protocol, and 175 ratifications and accessions. This convention identifies the rights of

persons with disabilities and serves to promote, protect, and ensure those rights. In March 2010 the government of Canada joined this list when it ratified the convention.

While our country, Mr. Speaker, has made incredible strides in creating equal opportunity and welcoming spaces for the disabled, we still have a very long way to go. Based on 2012 data from the Canadian survey on disabilities, almost 14 per cent of the Canadian population is affected by some sort of disability. People with disabilities are still too often struggling to seek secondary education, equal payment, and employment. The stigma surrounding disability has to end, and it needs to end today.

As the mother of a child that faces these challenges, I know what my child along with others with disabilities are capable of. I'm incredibly encouraged that the government will soon be creating the first disability advocate in Alberta's history. This is an important first step in creating the essential role that advocates for these incredible individuals and helps them to navigate a system that can often seem overwhelming.

Mr. Speaker, as elected officials we must lead the charge in creating an inclusive and welcoming society that values equal opportunity, kindness, diversity, and acceptance. I feel so completely blessed to be able to use my voice to support and to advocate for and to empower persons with disabilities, and I will continue to strive to shape a world in which every day is a day that celebrates these remarkable and extremely able individuals from across our province and the world.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent to allow a representative from the Alberta Party to respond as well as to ask for the Routine to extend past 3 p.m. today.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. December 3 marked the 25-year anniversary of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The United Nations founded this day of observance to promote awareness and understanding of persons with disabilities and to mobilize action around issues of accessibility, mobility, and dignity. I'm proud to rise in the House to acknowledge this important day and to salute all persons with disability in our province and around the world.

While we have observed the International Day of Persons with Disabilities since 1992, the sentiment goes back a number of decades. In 1976 the United Nations proclaimed 1981 the International Year of Disabled Persons, and two years later the decade of persons with disabilities was proclaimed. These were important steps, and there are many tangible ways the world has changed for the better because of these initiatives.

In the past it was common to think of disability as a problem rooted in the body. This was an assumption upheld by those in the medical profession and one that often found its way into political discourse. Now we have to ask each other and ourselves some tough questions when it comes to ability and disability. Do we as a society fail to empower people whose abilities may be atypical?

Today I ask that all members of this House take the time to reflect on this important day and how we think about ability and disability. I ask that we consider the diverse needs of our constituents, colleagues, and friends, who may themselves grapple with a disability. I would also like to send a gentle reminder to all members of this House. Disabilities may not always be visible and may not

always be obvious, but they are no less real. Disability does not exist in a vacuum. We must continue to acknowledge how disability intersects with other forms of discrimination and thank the community for bringing forward their diverse experiences.

I look forward to a day where we can support one another with the goal of a progressive and mindful Alberta that reflects all of our needs, goals, and limitations.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there was a request for unanimous consent, if you would, for an introduction of guests who were missed.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the House for indulging me. It is an honour to introduce to you and through you 12 members of the council administration staff from Thorhild county. Here today are Wayne Franklin, Richard Filipchuk, Janelle Cornelius, Chynne Shaw, and Cheryl Pasay. They're all here from Thorhild county to bring Christmas wishes to the government and the members of the Assembly. I would ask you to extend the customary warm greeting of the Assembly.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Trans Mountain Pipeline Construction Opposition

Mr. Nixon: Last December, when our Premier met with B.C.'s NDP leader, he said after that meeting that she had no intentions of persuading on pipelines, and the Premier seemed content with this, saying: I haven't changed his mind; he's still very committed to standing up for his constituents, and that is fine. Now we find out that during her visit to B.C. last week, the Premier didn't even bother to meet with B.C.'s Premier, instead choosing a Vancouver audience that was safe. A simple question to the Premier: is this government doing anything at all that is consequential to advocate for a pipeline to tidewater with the B.C. government?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me be very clear about one thing, and that is that the Trans Mountain expansion will be built. We will break the landlock. We will get our products to new markets. I was so proud to go to Vancouver last week to build support for this critical project amongst opinion leaders throughout the Lower Mainland. I did the exact same thing the week prior in Toronto and in Ottawa.

The Leader of the Opposition is familiar with Ottawa. He sat on Parliament Hill for two decades and did nothing to support the industry, Mr. Speaker. We have a very different record.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government has a failed record when it comes to much-needed resource projects. They've gotten two pipelines cancelled and another one that everybody is trying to obstruct. Words won't help. Words are not enough. We are glad to see the Premier starting to take action with words, as we have asked, but we need consequences. We need serious actions. Will the Premier stand up and make it clear what the consequences will be to B.C. if they continue to obstruct our pipelines, or will she

continue just to have words? Albertans are looking for more than words, Premier.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you what we won't do. We will not yell. We will not scream. We will not build a wall. We will not act like someone from south of the border. We will work respectfully and collaboratively with our colleagues across the country. We will talk to citizens across the country about the very important role that our energy industry plays for all citizens of this country, and we will continue to work to get this pipeline built, and we will succeed on behalf of all Albertans, and I invite the members opposite to join us.

Mr. Nixon: The federal NDP MP for Burnaby South, Kennedy Stewart, last week compared the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain expansion project to the Guantánamo Bay detention camp. It isn't a surprise that the new federal NDP leader also opposes the project in no uncertain terms. He said that, quote, we must oppose the expansion of the Kinder Morgan pipeline. It's fine for the Premier to continue to stand up here and give words, but there need to be consequences. There needs to be serious action taken beyond words. Will the Premier stand up, make it clear what the consequences will be to B.C. if they continue to block pipelines? If not, it's nothing but words. Albertans need action.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Interestingly, while we're in the business of quotes, the president of Kinder Morgan Canada, you know, the company that's actually building the pipeline, describes our government as, quote, strong and unwavering partners of ours and of our industry. End quote. That is because we are doing the grown-up thing. We are not making threats. We are not making outrageous claims that we have no ability to back up. We are working carefully and respectfully with the citizens of this country to get the job done.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Provincial Credit Rating and Debt-servicing Costs

Mr. Nixon: Last week under this government's watch Alberta's credit was downgraded yet a shameful sixth time. Last week I tried asking the Finance minister about the increased borrowing costs that would come from this downgrade. After repeatedly dodging the question, he finally admitted to Albertans how much that downgrade would cost but only in this fiscal year. The crippling debt is a problem that extends well beyond this year. Is the government willing to release the expected costs of these downgrades over the next decade, or will they continue to hide behind ridiculous answers?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, the Minister of Finance answered his question last week and indicated that the cost of the most recent downgrade would be roughly \$50,000. But you know what? The important thing is that our government had a choice when the price of oil fell. We could have Albertans' backs, we could invest in jobs, we could invest in public services, we could invest in affordability, or we could take the tried-and-true efforts of the past, blow up

hospitals, lay off teachers and nurses, and make a bad situation worse. We chose the former, and things are looking up.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I pointed out that the minister finally did answer that question after eight questions, but I see we're yet again in the same spot now with the Premier. I asked a very simple question: how much will these six downgrades under her government's watch cost Albertans over the next decade? We're not looking for rhetoric. It sounds like the Premier is campaigning to be Leader of the Opposition. Stand up. Tell us your government's policy. Tell us how much this will cost Albertans. Simple question; simple answer.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the long haul the cost of financing our debt will be well below 1 per cent of the overall budget, but to eliminate that debt this year, for example, would mean getting rid of \$9 billion. That is the whole education system in the province. That is firing every teacher and shuttering every classroom. We are not going to go ahead with those kinds of ridiculous plans. Albertans expect a more responsible form of government. That is exactly what they are getting.

Mr. Nixon: Again more fearmongering, more deflections to simple answers.

Last year debt-servicing costs alone were over \$1 billion. That's \$240 for every man, woman, and child inside the province of Alberta, and all this Premier can stand up and continue to do is fearmonger over and over and over. So I'll try a different question but very simple. Does this Premier and the NDP government have any plans to avoid a seventh credit downgrade, or are they going to continue down this ridiculous, reckless path?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I will say is that what we won't do is cancel important projects that matter to Alberta families; for example, the project that the members opposite were calling down last week, disrespectfully calling "a fancy box," the new cancer centre. It was unbelievable. Albertans need a government that will stand up for them, that will invest in their future, that will invest in their families and invest in the public services that they desperately need, that for so long were overlooked. I'm so proud that it is our government that is here now making these decisions finally on behalf of the people of our province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Please, hon. members.

I believe we're at the third main question.

Carbon Levy Increase

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's disappointing to see the Premier continue with this behaviour. It's unbecoming of the Premier of Alberta. Here's a fact – you want to talk about facts – 12,000 Albertans lost full-time jobs in Alberta alone last month. Calgary and Edmonton still have high unemployment, and this Premier has stood in this House after putting in the largest tax increase in the history of this province, a tax increase that she hid from the people of Alberta when she campaigned, and we still have no social licence. So I will ask a question. Will the Premier recognize that her carbon tax has not worked and stop her reckless 50 per cent increase at the end of the month? [interjections]

The Speaker: Folks, just let me know when you're ready.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the unemployment rate in Alberta is at a two-year low. Tens of thousands of new jobs have been created. We know that we still have more work to do. Do not forget. We know we have more work to do. We care about Alberta families, so we're not going to throw a bunch more out of work for some ideological pursuit like theirs. In the meantime, drilling is up, retail sales are up, small-business confidence is up here in Alberta. Our plan is working, and we're going to keep working it because we know that's what's going to be best for all Alberta.

Mr. Nixon: This Premier wants to talk about ideological plans. She brought in the largest tax increase in the history of Alberta without even telling Albertans about it while she was campaigning. Again, I asked a simple question to the Premier today, through you, and she stands up with nothing but fearmongering and rhetoric. It's just ridiculous. Will the Premier and the NDP acknowledge that their carbon tax has brought no social licence, that it is hurting Alberta families? Stand up and do the right thing and stop the increase. In fact, I would go as far as to say: withdraw the carbon tax.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I will stand up and do is remind the member opposite that, in fact, when the Trans Mountain pipeline was approved at roughly this time last year, the people who made the decision to approve it actually identified our climate leadership plan as the reason for why it was approved. So I will not apologize. I will celebrate, and I will say that this is the kind of leadership that Albertans have been looking for for a very long time. Now, the members opposite say that they want to cancel it, so will they now stand up and tell the people of Calgary definitively that it is their plan to cancel the green line? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Nixon: The Premier's Trudeau Liberal allies may have liked her plan, but the people in B.C. that are blocking the pipeline that she keeps saying is going to get built certainly don't. The environmental activists, the extreme ones, actually, that she put on government panels that are working now to block Trans Mountain, didn't accept that social licence was a result of her carbon tax, that she lied to Albertans about when she was campaigning.

Mr. Bilous: Point of order.

Mr. Nixon: Happy to withdraw that comment there, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: But the reality is this. The NDP government do not have any social licence as a result of their carbon tax, and the question is: will they stop their reckless behaviour and recognize the consequences that Albertans are receiving as a result of their ideological policies?

2:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, I talked about, on your collective behalf, respect for each other. I would hope that that message will sustain itself for the next, I hope, 18 months.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it is very interesting to observe the creation of the strangest of allies, the extreme left and the extreme right, working together to somehow cut down Canada and our future. The message that I delivered in Toronto, Ottawa, and Vancouver is that the progressive majority of Canadians want to move forward, need to move forward, need to

support our sustainable and responsible energy industry, support the jobs it creates, and support what it will do for Canada on the international stage. I believe that we are growing support for that very vision. I think that those on . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Services for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Clark: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities, I want to draw the government's attention to the work of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. In their most recent annual report the council made 30 recommendations across 15 government departments and six community agencies. However, there's no follow-up about past recommendations, and there are no measures to track the implementation of current recommendations. To the Premier: how are you co-ordinating your ministers to ensure that these recommendations are fully implemented in a timely way to the benefit of all Albertans with disabilities?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the important question. We know that it is of critical importance that we constantly look to find ways to improve our services and supports to Albertans with disabilities. As a result, there is a great deal of work that is going on, whether we're talking about reviewing the AISH program and the criteria there as asked for by the Auditor General, whether we're talking about the work that the disability council will be doing under the leadership of the MLA for St. Albert, whether we are talking about the work that's been done with respect to PDD . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier, with apologies.
First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, I recently received a business card from a member of the council, and I was shocked to see a Gmail address. I learned that government staff had created a Gmail address for each council member. Now, this raises a lot of troubling questions, including whether Gmail is FOIP compliant, how the government will manage the increased IT security risk, and how the public perceives something so unprofessional on official GOA business cards. Again to the Premier: is it standard practice for your government to use Gmail, or is it only happening on this council, and if so, what does that say about the value that the government places on this council's work?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by saying that we very much value the work of the advisory council on disabilities, and we've been working, of course, collaboratively with a number of agencies as well as representatives and self-advocates within the disability community since our government was first elected.

On the matter of the e-mail I will be happy to have the minister get in touch with the member in order to answer that specific question.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, earlier this year this House unanimously passed a bill to create the disabilities advocate.

Albertans were very hopeful that this position would be created quickly to the benefit of Albertans living with disabilities and their families, friends, and supporters. But six months later not only do we still not have a disabilities advocate; the government hasn't even started the recruiting process. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: will you commit here and now to a timeline to recruit the disabilities advocate, and will you include the Premier's council in the process?

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the important question. We do know that Albertans have waited for decades to have that office set up. We are proud of the work that this side of the House did. We have that office now approved. It's not just hiring one individual; it's about setting up an office. We have done the background work, and fairly soon we will be moving with recruitment, and, yes, the Premier's council will be included in that process.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Community and Regional Economic Support Program

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The community and regional economic support program, or CARES, has allocated \$30 million to support economic growth and prosperity throughout our province. In my constituency the town of Stony Plain recently received \$40,000 in CARES funding to help support business development and create high-value jobs. Given the importance of this program in creating jobs and diversifying the economy, to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what new projects have been created as a result of the CARES program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for her question and also for being such a strong advocate for this program and other economic development opportunities within her riding. Dozens of communities across the province are creating jobs and diversifying their communities through the use of the CARES program. I can tell you that at AUMA two weeks ago I announced funding for 50 new initiatives. Some of those include a small-business incubator focused on supporting entrepreneurs looking to start social enterprise in Calgary, an indigenous pipeline monitoring program in Edmonton, an entrepreneurship mentoring program in Canmore, and a training program for small Alberta businesses . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

There seems to be a culture of using the desks as objects, but we have not yet crossed over that Rubicon about clapping.

First supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that one of the goals of CARES is to support diversification of the economy, especially in our critical industries, to the same minister: how does CARES encourage that diversification?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I just want to talk for a moment about the importance of this program. These are initiatives by local leaders and community leaders coming to government and saying: we have ideas on how to diversify our economy. Now, for some reason the opposition seems to think that

they know better than the local leaders who have received funding all across this province, including in every single one of their ridings. I'd love for them to have a conversation with their local leaders to find out how they feel about CARES funding. These are critical diversification projects they have not been able to move forward on. Just because you guys don't believe in diversification, the rest of Alberta does.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The CARES program is also very popular with municipalities, with over 80 applications from communities across the province. Given that co-operation between provincial and municipal officials is key to delivering programs successfully, to the same minister: what incentives are there for municipalities to both work together and work in tandem with their local MLA?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've been going around the province promoting this program – we've now had three intake windows for CARES – I made it very clear to local municipal leaders, including entities like Alberta's regional economic development alliances, who can all apply for CARES funding, that what we want to encourage is a regional approach to economic diversification. We know there are 344 municipalities in the province of Alberta. What we'd like to see are municipalities working together with each other in order to compete on the world stage. And you know what? This program has been very successful. I look forward to announcing the next round of CARES successful applicants and encourage all communities to apply.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, last week we learned that personal and corporate tax revenues were down lower than projected and that many Albertans who have been lucky enough to return to work are making significantly lower wages. Some Albertans have recovered, and we celebrate their success, but for far too many this has been an asymmetrical recovery. Many in the middle class are afraid of falling lower, and many lower income Albertans are struggling just to hang on. What is this government doing to ensure that we have an economic recovery for everyone?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for his question. It is an important one. You know, Alberta is just coming out of the worst recession, some say, since the '30s. The past two years have been very, very challenging. This is why our government made a choice to invest in infrastructure, to invest in front-line services. I can tell you that there are a number of different economic institutions that are forecasting that Alberta will grow at least by 4 per cent this year, and they attribute that primarily to two things. One is our historic infrastructure build, but as well investor confidence is up, coming from the approval . . .

2:20

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that this time of year has a lot of added costs for moms and dads, this Christmas is going to be

hard for many Albertans, with many people's incomes reduced significantly from what they were just a few years ago. Perhaps there's not much that the government can do directly to help them right now, but there is something the government could not do that would help them. The carbon tax is scheduled to go up on January 1 by 50 per cent, significantly increasing the costs of home heating fuel, electricity, and food. Will this government show compassion to these families by repealing the increase in the carbon tax on January 1?

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and discuss the details. Of course, rebates will go to 60 per cent of Albertans, a full rebate, the first week of January, just as they did last year. In addition, this government has undertaken a number of different initiatives to make life more affordable for families. We've eliminated a number of school fees. We've got a tuition freeze happening. We've got investment in \$25-per-day child care. We've got a cap on electricity rates. We've got the rebates, as I said. We've got a number of efficiency programs that are also putting a lot of Albertans to work. We've got a new child . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that there's nothing compassionate about raising taxes on the most vulnerable and there's nothing compassionate about running up so much debt that we jeopardize the social safety net that protects the most vulnerable Albertans – all of us in this House agree that it is our duty through charity and government to provide a safety net, but I'm not sure if everyone here understands how important sound financial management is to ensure that that safety net is sustainable – does the Finance minister not agree that unless he changes course, he will be jeopardizing important programs that vulnerable people rely on?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker. You know, the things we won't jeopardize are public education and public health care. That side has marked solutions for both of those things that would make life far more expensive for Albertans. We're going to follow through with our program. We're growing the fastest of any province. That's good news for everybody in this province, for companies and people. We're going to continue on that track because that will get us back to full recovery.

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

Carbon Levy Increase (continued)

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In less than one month the carbon tax is going to jump 50 per cent, creating more of a financial burden for Albertan families across this province when they can least afford it. Perhaps the most troubling fact is that this backward tax will attack our most vulnerable populations: seniors, low-income Albertans, those on AISH. When the legislation was introduced, this side of the House put forward multiple amendments asking the government to exempt our vulnerable populations and the organizations that serve them. These were voted down. Why is the government targeting vulnerable Albertans with the carbon tax?

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

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the full rebate goes to 60 per cent of Albertans. Two-thirds of Albertans get a rebate. If you're a couple who makes less than \$95,000, you're getting a \$450 rebate. If you have two kids, that goes to \$540. Low-income seniors in Alberta are getting a \$300 rebate. We've also set up energy efficiency programs for nonprofits, for small businesses, for community centres, for farms, for First Nations so that they can save money on their bills and live more comfortably.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, the rebates don't help the not-for-profits, and the rebates are less than the cost.

Mr. Speaker, given that we've heard from countless not-for-profit organizations that assist vulnerable Albertans that they will not be able to provide the level of service they once did or be able to serve the volume of clients they were once able to because of the impact of the NDP carbon tax and what it will do to their bottom line, why is the government not supporting our not-for-profit organizations by refusing to exempt them from the carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we moved forward with a number of different initiatives for nonprofits. Last year, if the hon. member was paying attention, she would have noticed that we had an audit program. We have the business, nonprofit, and institutional program. It's those energy efficiency programs that the folks across the way have done nothing but make fun of the entire time that we have had them introduced because they don't want those organizations to save money. They don't want to put people to work on energy retrofits and other forms of efficiencies. They want us to be stuck in the Stone Age.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we talked about judging the motives of other parties last week. I want to remind you about those kinds of comments.

Hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, I think we are at second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I don't know how energy efficiency is going to help not-for-profits at this point in time, however, if that's the way that the minister is going.

Given that not-for-profits are already struggling, Mr. Speaker, and there are high demands for their services and fewer donations because of the stressed economy and given that the carbon tax is a significant expense for these organizations regardless of the efficiencies, where does the government expect Albertans to run when the not-for-profits that actually provide the services for them are forced now to turn them away because of the carbon tax that is making it more expensive to operate the not-for-profits?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we have invested in a number of new initiatives for businesses, nonprofits, and institutions that are allowing folks to retrofit their operations to save money. I just toured a recreation centre on Thursday, Vivo in Calgary. They retrofitted their lighting, and they're saving \$80,000. That's exactly the kind of leadership that the Conservatives would turn their backs on. Those folks in Calgary: they're doing the right thing.

Tourism Industry in Northern Alberta

Mr. Loewen: Every hotel customer in Alberta pays a tourist tax, whether they are working, visiting family, or touring the region. In

2015-2016 northern Alberta paid \$9 million in tourism tax and received \$732,000 in return for development and events, and that number eroded by 36 per cent the following year. Does the minister feel that it's fair to neglect the tourism needs of northern rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, our government is investing in jobs and diversifying the economy by working through tourism infrastructure. It's very important to ensure that we are making those investments to bring not just Albertans on holidays to other places but also internationally as well. There is a considerable investment, and it's an equitable way by which we can help to promote the tourist industry.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the government talks about diversifying the economy but the government does everything to do anything but diversify the economy and given that northern Alberta's economy has been hit hard by the carbon tax and given that tourism taxes in northern Alberta are down \$1.4 million year over year from 2016 to 2017, will the minister admit that his provincial tourism promotion spending is not working for northern Alberta and that the job-killing carbon tax is hurting tourism, just like it's hurting the rest of Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's funny that the hon. member would say that because, certainly, there is more tourism in the province of Alberta than we've seen in a number of years, and investment internationally is considerable as well. I was just up in his neck of the woods last week, and the economy is booming. You know, he can't have it both ways. You've got to make sure that you make the investments and then you reap the rewards as appropriate.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the minister maybe needs to look at a few facts before he answers a question and given that on May 30 of last year the minister of tourism suggested that a higher U.S. dollar increases buying power and therefore helps tourism and given that the government has implemented a job-killing carbon tax, driving up the price of everything, and it will rise another 50 per cent on January 1, to the minister: if a rising U.S. dollar increases buying power, does it not make sense that visitors will have less purchasing power and that the carbon tax will drive tourism away?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, what doesn't make any sense is to constantly run down our province, as the UCP does. They make it sound as though there's something wrong with our province. I'm proud to be an Albertan, and I'm proud of our tourism industry here. It has seen record years, and it will see another record year here come next summer.

Thank you.

Provincial Fiscal Policies (continued)

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, when the question of balanced budgets is raised, government-side MLAs race to be the first to shout out and misrepresent others' spending restraint. However, the government loosely suggests moving towards a balanced budget by 2023 without any strategy or plan. To the Minister of Finance. It is clear that you have no plans to restrain public-sector spending, and your policies are clearly not attracting global investment to bolster

jobs, economic activity, and revenue, so tell us, Minister: how do you intend to balance your spendthrift budget?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I take objection to the idea that there have been no savings achieved by this government. That side let CEOs go to golf courses, have really great health memberships. We cut all of that. We cut the salaries and eliminated the bonuses of the highest paid executives of Alberta's ABCs by \$33 million. We extended a salary freeze until September 2019 for management, and that's going to save \$29 million a year.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, all that and you still can't balance a budget.

Given that the minister clearly believes he can address the deficit without actually controlling spending [interjections] . . .

The Speaker: Order, please. Order.

Mr. Gottfried: I'll start again, Mr. Speaker. Even then they can't balance the budget.

Given that the minister clearly believes he can address the deficit without actually controlling spending and given that he is clearly counting on creating a new magical revenue stream despite consistent underperformance of both personal and corporate revenue and has yet to conjure up any revenue magic with his red ink provincial fiscal wand, again to the minister: you have clearly demonstrated your inability to manage expenses, so where will you find \$10 billion in additional revenue in order to balance the budget by . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, you know, Jason Kenney wants to look out for his friends and insiders. He'd like to keep the golf club perks.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

Mr. Ceci: He'd like to keep the memberships and access to private health care. We're not going to do those sorts of things. We're going to carefully look at where the reductions need to be made, Mr. Speaker, and we are. We're going through all of that. That was all set in place by those folks. We're reducing that because that's the right thing to do, and Albertans expect it.

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, I wonder how much the membership to the red ink club is going to cost them.

Given that U of C economist Trevor Tombe astutely observed that based on the recent Q2 update we need resource revenues to be 26 per cent of our budget and given that in 2015-16 we only relied on 19 per cent of our budget to come from resource revenue and clearly the NDP are making Alberta more reliant on oil revenue, not less, and given that the minister has been telling Albertans incessantly that the NDP are getting off the resource roller coaster, again to the minister: why are you blatantly misrepresenting the facts to Albertans? [interjections]

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, that doesn't seem parliamentary over there.

But I will tell you that we're not going to take advice from members opposite, who couldn't balance the budget when oil was

a hundred dollars. Their friends in Saskatchewan have imposed a 6 per cent sales tax on new construction and other things, Mr. Speaker. We're not doing that. We're responsibly looking at those places a budget can be cut, and we're bringing those in. Under the Q2 update I can tell you that drilling is up, retail sales are up, manufacturing is up. Things are looking up. They don't want . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Flood Damage Mitigation in Calgary and Area

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A flooding event devastated Calgary in 2013. In the aftermath of the disaster the government promised the shaken citizens that it would take concrete steps to protect them from future flood waters. But four and a half years later Calgarians are still waiting. To the Minister of Transportation: where is the promised flood protection now?

Ms Jansen: I want to thank the member for the question. Certainly, when we talk about the Springbank offstream reservoir, it's one of the issues that I think this government is taking extremely seriously. The government of Alberta committed to the Springbank offstream reservoir project in October of 2015, and that commitment has not wavered. In fact, the project is the best option, we feel, to protect the city of Calgary and other downstream communities from another flooding event like the one in 2013. We continue to work on that and consider it a very viable option for us in the future.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the neighbouring Tsuut'ina Nation opposes the Springbank dam, as do most of the landowners who would be displaced by the project, and given that surely the minister has consulted with all of the parties involved, to the Minister of Transportation: what kinds of resolutions have you fostered to move a flood project ahead?

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

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the member that conversations with Tsuut'ina and the local landowners are ongoing as the province moves forward with the Springbank project. But it's not just about Springbank; it's also about that we're investing \$150 million for local flood protection projects in the city of Calgary. Of course, we also created the Bow River Working Group to assess potential future Bow River flood mitigation options. Those are all funded as operating grants. Those are the kinds of things that you could not fund with the kinds of cuts that are being proposed by the Conservatives.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the cost of this project has already doubled to \$400 million over the past few years and given that neither the Calgarians nor the Tsuut'ina Nation nor taxpayers can afford to have it drag on, to the minister: when will flood mitigation be in place for Calgarians?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. You know, we think it's important, obviously, to do the work of consultation. That has been important through this whole process. Working in tandem with the Glenmore reservoir SR1, we're going to ensure that flood mitigation is

capable of protecting against 2013 levels. I do want to say that when we talk about the importance of these projects and about cost savings, it's important to remember that our government is committed to these issues in terms of how they work with environmental issues while our friends across the way are interested in scoring political . . .

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

Cannabis Distribution and Sale

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On July 1 of next year cannabis will be legal across Alberta. Selling cannabis illegally has been extremely lucrative for criminals in Alberta for decades. They seem to be able to make millions of dollars, yet the government has indicated that in the first years of legalization Alberta will actually lose money on legalized cannabis. To the Minister of Finance: how is it possible the NDP government will make no money in the same line of business where criminals have been getting rich for years?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to reiterate, there are three guiding principles: one, making sure that our roads and our workplaces are safe; two, making sure that this product is kept out of the hands of youth; and three, making sure that we take out the illicit and illegal market. To be able to do that, you need to make sure that you price it at the right point. We're working to ensure that that happens, and at the same time we're doing the other important investments to make sure that the other values are also followed through. Alberta is not alone in this. We need to do this as a national effort to keep our communities safe and to take out the illicit market.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the government has left the door open to have provincial workers deliver cannabis purchased through their online system instead of having Canada Post do that job and given that Canada Post successfully delivers medical cannabis across Canada every day, to the minister: since you've already stated that you can't make money selling the stuff, why are you even considering creating a brand new, money-losing public service to duplicate what Canada Post does now and has done for over a hundred years?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. We did do consultation with Albertans on a number of different components, and we've decided to make sure that we move forward with a private retail model, public distribution and private retail for the storefront piece. We do believe that there is a significant opportunity for greater oversight and support in terms of the online component, and we look forward to following models that I understand other jurisdictions are looking at as well. This is not unusual. This is something that we're going to keep working at to provide that protection for the youth, protection for our work sites, protection for our roads, and making sure that we cut out the illicit market.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker: losing stores, losing mail service. Given that criminals sell marijuana because it's illegal and they have no law-abiding competition for that market and given that they make lots of money doing trade in the shadows, again to the Minister of Finance, if he'll get on his feet: how do you convince Albertans of your financial competence when you're running \$10

billion plus annual deficits and you can't even figure out how to make a buck selling dope?

Mr. Ceci: You know, the whole discussion about cannabis sales and taxation will be coming up at the federal-provincial-territorial first ministers' meeting on Monday of next week, Mr. Speaker, a week from today. I'll have more to say about all that, obviously, after that period in time, but as the Deputy Premier has already said, we're responsibly going into this whole thing with our eyes wide open after consulting with Albertans about their wishes. Albertans have directed, have said: this is the way we want it to unfold in terms of the private and public.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

2:40 School Construction and Modernization in Northeast Edmonton

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Northeast Edmonton is one of the fastest growing parts of the city. The community of Pilot Sound is full of young families and children that are in need of a school, or they may have to deal with the prospect of long commutes and cramped classrooms. Despite the fact that this neighbourhood was first laid for development back in the 1980s, it has yet to receive a public elementary school. To the Minister of Education: can the minister report on the progress being made to build an elementary school in Pilot Sound?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this side of the House recognizes that an investment in new capital projects for schools means an investment in our children and an investment to diversify our economy here in the province. For example, people in Medicine Hat, Cold Lake, Grande Prairie are enjoying the new schools that we built using this process, but they would have not been built if the UCP had their way, cutting 20 per cent.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Ms Sweet: Our new schools often open full or nearly full, and the schools which aren't full have greater enrolment than expected. Can the same minister please explain how the government is planning ahead on the community growth?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to share that using the lists that we get from school boards as the way we build priorities for which schools are being built – for example, last week I announced funding for a much-needed high school in southwest Edmonton, adding 1,800 spaces. Just last week we also announced a new elementary in south Edmonton and a special high school in Lewis Farms. We use the process, we use it in a scientific way, and we make sure that the schools get built as the school boards outline for us.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that a new school for Pilot Sound was announced, but during the same announcement the minister also announced funding for redevelopment of Ben Calf Robe Catholic school. To the same

minister: what is the government doing to increase the capacity by modernizing our schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Certainly, it's important to modernize schools as well as build new ones. We listen to the priority needs of each of our school boards, and we make the decisions as we see fit. Once again, students in Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, and Cold Lake are certainly outstanding students, but you know what? If the UCP had their way, they would be out standing in a field because those schools would never get built.

Agricultural Plastics Recycling

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, agricultural plastic waste is growing in central Alberta and the province. In 2012 it was reported in the Alberta government survey titled Agricultural Plastics Recycling: Agricultural Producers Survey, page 18: "It is notable that burning agricultural plastics is a common practice." Why has this government not been willing and not been involved in looking for solutions for all agricultural plastics recycling in the two and a half years that they've been elected?

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

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. I, too, have heard from a number of people on the matter of agricultural plastics. It's come up at the federal-provincial-territorial table as well. Our recycling regulations are in need of update – there's no question about that – and that will be coming in the coming weeks.

Mr. Orr: So far there's no sign of it.

Given that a working group called the Agricultural Plastics Recycling Group formed in 2016 and involves the majority of stakeholders in the agricultural sector in the province, including recycling organizations, municipalities, ag fieldmen, plastics manufacturers and retailers, even Alberta Agriculture and Alberta Environment, do they have the minister's commitment to move ahead with a provincial ag plastics recycling program to provide an environmental solution for farmers and Albertans, or should they just have to keep burning it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, people should not burn their agricultural plastics. There's no question that our recycling regulations were left to languish by the previous government, and there were a number of different consultations that occurred that went nowhere, so we picked it up, and we're going to make sure that those consultations are accurately reflected in the new regulatory package. That takes time. We want to make sure that we talk to municipalities and to others to make sure that we're getting it right on recycling of these plastics and others. There's no question that this work remains to be done, and we're going to do it.

Mr. Orr: Consultation has been going on for years already. Does this government really care about the environment or only if they can hijack it in order to justify a massive tax grab? Given that this government has done nothing to address the growing problem of ag plastic, which as it gets burned is highly toxic and emits greenhouse gases, and given that the Saskatchewan government has had an ag plastic recycling pilot project for several years now, when will this

government commit to introducing an ag plastics recycling program for Alberta agricultural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member would like to ask questions about why the consultations in 2008, 2012, 2013, 2014 went nowhere, he should ask his new colleagues from the former Progressive Conservative caucus because they did nothing. So we are examining this. We've gone out and made sure that we've got a few new consultations to make sure that we know exactly where everyone is at, we know exactly how to get this thing right, and we will do so. We'll be bringing forward new regulations, and we'll get done what the hon. member's new friends couldn't do.

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

Imperial Oil Cold Lake Oil Sands Project

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twenty-two months ago Imperial Oil applied to the Alberta Energy Regulator for the approval of a 55,000 barrels per day SAGD expansion project near Cold Lake, and if approved, that project will bring thousands of direct and indirect jobs and a \$2.2 billion investment. To the minister. Twenty-two months sounds and looks like red tape. At what stage is this project approval, and if there is any holdup, is that your ministry or is it the Alberta Energy Regulator?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, our focus is making life better for Albertans, and we are working with industry on a number of matters. We have two pipeline approvals. There are good jobs coming back in the oil patch, there's more production, there's more investment, and we're proud to work with industry on made-in-Alberta solutions for each of the areas.

Mr. Panda: Given, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta Energy has been sitting on a report dealing with the safe recovery of bitumen from beneath water bodies for over three years, refusing to publicly release it to the industry, and given the number of lakes and water bodies in the Cold Lake, Athabasca, and Peace River areas, to the minister: why does the Official Opposition have to fight for the release of the taxpayer-funded research while the NDP would keep industry in the dark when much-needed jobs are on the line?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we work within Energy on a number of matters, and I'm proud to point out that the AER recently has been working on leading in the methane regulations, which industry has been co-operating with us on. We're coming up again with a made-in-Alberta plan rather than something imposed from Ottawa.

Mr. Panda: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the Cold Lake area has been hit hard by the economic downturn and that these highly skilled, well-paid jobs would go a long ways to recovery and given that the unemployment rate now stands at 8 per cent in the Cold Lake area, Minister, if the proponent comes to you and commits to complying with the safety and environmental standards, will you expedite the approval of this Cold Lake project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I had mentioned, we work with industry, we work with the AER, and if there's a particular problem that is not being addressed to your satisfaction, I'd welcome you to give me the details because I can't speak to that one particular project.

The Speaker: In 30 seconds we will continue with Members' Statements.

2:50

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On December 3 of every year since 1992 communities around the world observe International Day of Persons with Disabilities. In 1992 the United Nations General Assembly declared an annual observance of the rights of persons with disabilities. The aim of this declaration is to promote the rights and well-being of people with disabilities in all spheres of society and development.

How do we ensure that we leave no one behind? How do we do everything we can to promote the individual autonomy and independence of people with disabilities? We create real solutions by seeing the existing problems and barriers. We acknowledge that women and girls with disabilities are at far greater risk than their nondisabled peers for violence, injury, abuse, neglect, negligent treatment, and exploitation. We acknowledge the significant barriers to community living, inclusive education, and full employment and that they continue to exist and must be methodically addressed by all Canadians. We acknowledge that poverty is a grinding reality for far too many people with disabilities.

Once we acknowledge the realities, we can effectively work towards eliminating barriers to full inclusion for people with disabilities. Barriers need to be torn down by creating inclusive legislation that is not created for people with disabilities but created with them. Full inclusion must be expected and supported by doing things like removing humiliating processes that are put in place to exclude people from living and moving into communities. Full employment for people with disabilities will only be the norm when employers see and appreciate the value of employees with disabilities.

Freedom from abuse and violence requires empowerment, and empowerment comes from the lived experience of equality, inclusion, and access, so today and every day let's acknowledge the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and take a moment and think about what you and your community can do to ensure no one is left behind.

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

Carbon Levy Increase

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As winter closes in on us with all its might, it's a good time to talk about how this government's ideological carbon tax is going to harm Alberta farmers and ranchers when it goes up to \$30 a tonne on January 1. On this side of the House we have long warned about the unintended consequences to some of this government's poorly thought out bills.

Farmers and ranchers are not, as many people seem to believe, exempt from the carbon tax. While it is true that they do not pay the tax on dyed fuels for the equipment directly involved in farming, they are still greatly impacted by this tax on everything, a tax this

government didn't campaign on. When the cold temperatures hit, costs will soar on January 1. Expenses such as transportation costs will go up for the trucks and trains that ship the grains, crops, and livestock to consumers around the world. These costs will have to be absorbed by the producers or passed on to the consumer, leading to rises in food costs at grocery stores and restaurants. The price of natural gas will increase, so heating greenhouses, barns, and other outbuildings will become that much more expensive.

Mr. Speaker, there used to be a cheaper alternative to producers, stoker coal used as an economic alternative to heating in areas where natural gas isn't readily available. But this government made sure that was taken completely off the table. You may recall the farmer from Vermilion who uses stoker coal to heat his shop and outbuildings. On his load of coal he paid \$42 a tonne. In addition, his carbon tax was \$35.49 per tonne, so he ended up paying an additional 90 per cent in taxes. Guess what? As of January 1 the carbon tax portion on a \$45 tonne of stoker coal will be \$53.09. That's a 118 per cent tax.

With increased costs like this I wonder if Santa Claus will join other companies fleeing for friendly economic climates, but, hey, this government's got our backs.

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

Human Rights Day

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On December 10 every year we observe international Human Rights Day. That's because on December 10 in 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the universal declaration of human rights. This year marks the 69th anniversary of the declaration and kicks off the year-long campaign to recognize this milestone document for its 70th anniversary next year.

I cannot overstate the importance of this document. The declaration proclaimed the inalienable rights which every person is inherently entitled to regardless of race, colour, religion, gender, language, personal politics, national or social origin, birth, or class status. It's available in over 500 languages and is the most translated document in the world.

The declaration sets out universal values for our global community and establishes the equal dignity and worth of every single person. While there is still a lot of work to be done, the declaration has stood the test of time. Its principles of equality, justice, and human dignity have endured, and the spirit of the declaration, those values and principles, are just as valuable today as they were in 1948. As members of this Legislature and members of our communities it's our job to stand up for others. That's why I was proud to stand in this House and vote to add gender identity and gender expression to the Alberta Human Rights Act and for greater protection for young Albertans to join GSAs. That's why we work so hard to make life better for Albertans, and that's how I'm going to celebrate this milestone, by committing to make life better for everyone.

I look forward to joining my colleagues in celebrating this important document in the days ahead, remembering that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Thank you.

Rural Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, for over five and a half years I and other members of this House have been raising serious concerns regarding the vast array of problems with the rural ambulance system. Despite constant complaints by residents, elected officials, and EMS paramedics, patients across Alberta continue to feel the

impact because of this failed system. Ambulance time wasted on nonemergency transfers, flexing of units into other communities, paramedics needlessly tied up for hours in emergency departments, units not being returned to their home regions, and faulty centralized dispatch protocols continue to plague the system.

These problems were emphasized once again recently, when on November 15, 2017, a number of Alberta paramedics came to the Legislature in desperation, claiming that the number of events that led to emergency calls has increased nearly 36 per cent since 2009 while the population of Alberta has increased by more than 15 per cent, yet we have virtually the same number of ambulances. They added that resources have been stretched to the breaking point. Injured and sick Albertans are paying the price for the lack of resources as they wait for help to arrive. Paramedics also pay the price with increased stress and mental health injuries.

Over the years several significant reports have been conducted on these problems, including that of the Health Quality Council of Alberta, Rural Health Services Review Committee, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the central Alberta municipalities group, and the southern paramedics that produced the suburban-rural EMS deployment review. Yet this government ignores all of this. It's time to give our paramedics the resources they need, that we return to local dispatch, that we stop the practice of using ambulances as taxis, that ambulances are released from emergency rooms within an hour and are then mandatorily returned to their home regions.

These are solutions that United Conservatives will continue to advocate for. We will fight tirelessly to put Albertans first and fix these critical ambulance problems once and for all.

Thank you.

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

UFCW Local 401 Shoe Drive for Women's Shelters

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm here today to talk about a very important initiative: the UFCW local 401 annual shoe drive. This is the third year that this event has taken place and the second year that my constituency office has participated. The purpose of this shoe drive is to collect shoes to donate to a women's shelter in Alberta. Last year shoes were donated to WIN House, and this year the shoes were donated to the Ermineskin Women's Shelter Society.

I'm very proud of the fact that the number of individuals and groups assisting to collect shoes this year has grown. In addition to the hard work of the Women's Committee of UFCW local 401 and my constituency manager, Maria, we were joined by 16 other caucuses within our group of offices as well as CDI College north campus. Together, we were able to collect over 500 shoes in the Edmonton area alone for women in need.

Violence against all women is simply unacceptable, yet it continues. This has got to stop, Mr. Speaker. Together, you and I can help make a difference.

I highly commend the Women's Committee of UFCW local 401 for taking on this initiative to assist women fleeing from domestic violence. I would also like to thank my colleagues for collecting all the shoes at their constituency offices, and finally, I would like to extend a huge thank you to CDI College north campus for all of their assistance, from collecting shoes to being the site where the shoes were presented to the Ermineskin Women's Shelter Society. Together, each and every one of us can make a difference, ensuring that violence against women is completely eradicated.

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

3:00 Racism and Religious Discrimination

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a proud history as a land of opportunity. Many Albertans today are either immigrants to Canada who chose to live in Alberta or are the descendants of those who did. No matter one's cultural heritage or religious practice, our province has been one where everyone has the opportunity to find work, raise and support families, and worship in peace. We can and should be proud of Alberta's model for diversity.

Disturbingly, a recent media report this weekend captured a deeply troubling, racially motivated tirade in the middle of a Calgary Superstore. I know that all members here today will join me in condemning such forms of racism and bigotry. The angry racism captured in that video is simply not the Alberta we know, love, and serve.

This is an opportunity for all of us to reaffirm our commitment to reject and eliminate racial and religious discrimination in our province. Alberta must continue to be a place where all are welcome no matter their cultural heritage or religious practice. We must be mindful of ensuring that nothing we do here can be interpreted as being against diversity. Sadly, on a few occasions I've seen some members opposite belittle Albertans of faith. I can only assume that they were not aware of what they were doing. We must all agree that Alberta must continue to be a place where all are welcome. There's no room for bigotry and racism in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise and give oral notice of a bill to be introduced tomorrow, that being Bill 216, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2017.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 32

An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today to introduce Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta.

This bill proposes to amend the Election Act and the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act to make elections more fair, accessible, and balanced. As well, this bill, if passed, will mean new rules to prevent the flow of dark money influencing our elections, to make elections more accessible and easier for people to get out and vote, Mr. Speaker, as well as making sure that we essentially update our Election Act, which has not had significant updates since the 1980s. It's time we move forward with a fair and more democratic and modern electoral system, and it is my pleasure to introduce this bill.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Bill 33 Electoral Divisions Act

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising on behalf of the hon. Government House Leader to request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 33, the Electoral Divisions Act.

This bill would make certain changes to the names and boundaries of Alberta's electoral divisions. These changes reflect the proposals of an independent Electoral Boundaries Commission. The commission conducted an extensive review of Alberta's electoral map and received written and oral submissions from the people of Alberta. The commission recommends the creation of three new electoral divisions and the consolidation of three areas with below-average population growth over the past eight years. We're moving forward with the recommendations to ensure this process is both transparent and objective. As members are aware, this matter was brought to this Chamber for debate on the evening of November 28. The Assembly concurred with the report while making a small number of changes to individual constituency names. It is on that basis that Bill 33 is presented today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I asked my question today, I made reference to the government actually talking about delivering marijuana through a mirrored system to Canada Post. What I have here is a *Globe and Mail* article from December 4 confirming that that is what the government has said is a possibility.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, today I talked about a report that Alberta Energy is sitting on and that the industry has been demanding the release of, the Assessment of SATAC for Hydrocarbon Production for Underground Facilities below Water Bodies. This is a 415-page report. I'm only tabling 181 pages. This report was prepared by the Reservoir Geomechanics Research Group at the U of A for Alberta Energy and delivered in October 2014, and the industry has been looking for this. I'm glad to table this report.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a document entitled Jason Kenney Proposes Drastic Cut to Alberta's Per Capita Spending, Balanced Budget in 3 Years, that I'll be speaking about briefly.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table a letter, dated November 30, received from the AAMD and C. I believe all MLAs have received a copy, and I encourage them to read it before we get into deliberations on Bill 33. They are calling for effective representation for rural Albertans in Alberta's Legislative Assembly.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Gray, Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal, pursuant to the Government Organization Act authorized radiation health administrative organization annual

reports for the following organizations: the Alberta Association for Safety Partnerships for the period from September 1, 2015, to December 31, 2016; the Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors for the period from July 1, 2016, to June 30, 2017; the Alberta Dental Association and College for the period from January 1, 2016, to December 31, 2016; the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association for the period from November 1, 2015, to October 31, 2016; the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta for the period from January 1, 2016, to December 31, 2016; the University of Alberta for the period from April 1, 2016, to March 31, 2017; the University of Calgary for the period from April 1, 2016, to March 31, 2017.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe there was one point of order, which was withdrawn.

3:10

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 208 Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017

[Debate adjourned November 27: Mr. Hinkley speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we had the chance to introduce debate on second reading of Bill 208, the Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

This particular private member's bill has been constituent driven. It started during the campaign and has continued ever since, where constituents, consumers have been looking for clarity and information on their utility bills. They've often indicated that they've controlled consumption or that it has gone down but that the bills continue to rise. They want to know whom they appeal to if they have disputes with those retail companies, and they want to know what can be done about unexpected and perceived unfair utility bills. To help consumers when they purchase electricity contracts, this bill will give them the opportunity to do that by connecting with the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

I did have an opportunity to meet with the Utilities Consumer Advocate and hear about some of the work that that department is doing already to help the consumers of Alberta with their energy concerns. This bill will enshrine the role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate in law so that the UCA can be there for Albertans for the future.

The Utilities Consumer Advocate is an important resource for Albertans, and every year they handle 30,000 to 40,000 inquiries. They produce educational material and run outreach events across the province. They provide mediation services to consumers who cannot reach agreement with their utility providers, and often their intervention is enough to settle most disputes. They run a program every year reconnecting utilities for people who have had their services disconnected so that some of Alberta's most vulnerable do not suffer through a winter without heat or power. They conduct research and represent consumers at proceedings of the Alberta Utilities Commission, and since 2013 the UCA's interventions at commission hearings have saved more than \$800 million on energy bills.

This is an important role, Madam Speaker, and I am proud to be putting forward a bill that will allow this valuable office the authority to do its job under legislation and not just under regulation.

The bottom line, Madam Speaker, is that this bill is about consumer protection. With this bill, we are ensuring that consumers are protected against potential unforeseen financial stress. I am proud to be part of a government that takes the responsibility to provide a stable and fair electricity system seriously. The government has already taken steps to ensure that the generation system meets the needs of Albertans into the future. Moving to a capacity market and providing the Alberta Electric System Operator and the Balancing Pool with stability into 2030 will help ensure a smooth transition to a more sustainable and stable economic market for the future. Supporting microgeneration for consumers and supporting renewable energy projects for schools and municipalities will help Albertans take more control over their own electricity needs and generation.

But the electricity generation system is only one part of what makes Alberta's energy market work. The government recognized that energy contracts are complex and took action to ban door-to-door sales of energy contracts and services after receiving more than one thousand complaints from Albertans about aggressive and misleading sales tactics.

The consumer also needs to be informed about their options, and Bill 208 takes steps to make sure that all Albertans have the information they need about their rights as consumers when it comes to purchasing electricity or natural gas contracts. Prior to and since the bill's introduction I have received a lot of positive feedback from those constituents. The goal here is to ensure that consumers have the greatest possible protection and to ensure that they have clarity and confidence that they will not be taken advantage of.

Madam Speaker, it has been great to hear the perspectives of everyday Albertans on the proposed legislation, and I look forward to hearing more from them as we move through this process. At the end of the day, this legislation simply will allow consumers to access the information they need to make smart choices.

Madam Speaker, as I've said before, this bill builds on best practices already in place in the industry here in Alberta and in other jurisdictions. This bill will be another important step in an ongoing discussion around consumer protection in Alberta, and I look forward to the opportunity to continue the debate here in this Assembly about making life better for Albertans.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In looking at this bill, one of the initial thoughts that I had as I was going through it was whether or not the advocate's office had actually requested these sorts of things or whether this was just something that the hon. member took on his own initiative. I would still like to know that.

There are, of course, with any piece of legislation pros and cons. Increased consumer awareness is always a good idea. More information being made available to the consumer in one centralized place is a good thing for Albertans. Consumers deserve to be informed about their options and any issues that others in their community have faced when it comes to choosing their power provider.

I don't see any reason, however, why this cannot already be done by the Utilities Consumer Advocate's office under the existing

legislation and regulations. I just question whether this was actually an effective use of the House's time since these things could already be done. I understand that the hon. member wants to see this enshrined in legislation – and that's fine – but these powers were already held by the consumer advocate's office under the regs.

I would also like clarification from the hon. member, when he's got a minute, on whether the Utilities Consumer Advocate's office was involved in the writing of this amendment. Was it something they specifically requested? Were these issues that they themselves brought up as, you know, issues they wanted to see in legislation because the regs were insufficient for them? Those sorts of things, I think, are important for us in the House to know.

I recommend to my colleagues on this side and all the members in this House that we support this bill. It's not that there's anything particularly wrong with it.

You know, in the consultation that we had with people within industry and different organizations, they all wondered the same thing: well, why do we need this since the advocate's office can already do these sorts of things? Perhaps it is that the amendment spells out in more detail existing powers of the Utilities Consumer Advocate and turns some of their underutilized or unutilized power into a requirement to disclose and collect and use information about distributors and providers and retailers from the Market Surveillance Administrator, the AUC, the director of fair trading, and any other person the advocate's office considers necessary. Again, just pointing out that it's already within the minister's power to have the advocate's office disclose this information called for under any proposed amendment.

I'd be interested to hear from the hon. member what sort of feedback he got from the advocate's office regarding this and the need for it. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It gives me pleasure to rise and give a few remarks with respect to Bill 208, Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017. I thank the hon. member for bringing this bill forward. I know that it really was embedded in a desire to strengthen the role of the advocate and enshrine the regulations in legislation, which will give it the importance that I believe the regulations should have.

I'm pleased today to rise in support of Bill 208. I commend my colleague the MLA for Wetaskiwin-Camrose once again for bringing this bill forward. It plays an important role in the ongoing effort of our government and caucus to make life better for Albertans. Many in this province will have noticed our emphasis on consumer protection items. We definitely asked Albertans to come forward with their ideas with respect to areas where they thought consumer protection might be improved. This measure is one result that I think will be lauded by those Albertans who seek a higher level of consumer protection for people in the province. Our caucus firmly believes that our laws and regulations should be effective and enforceable so that consumers and businesses have confidence in our marketplace. Not only will this bill help protect Albertans' pocketbooks; it will lead to increased consumer confidence, and that's good for business.

3:20

One of the great things about this bill, Madam Speaker, is the fact that it will, if passed, enshrine the role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, or UCA, in legislation, as has been mentioned by

previous speakers. I was impressed to learn from my colleague exactly how important the office of the UCA is to consumers in Alberta. The UCA is a powerful voice for safe, reliable, cost-effective energy utility services that meet the needs of Alberta consumers.

Did you know, Madam Speaker, that every year the office handles about 30,000 to 40,000 inquiries? This includes everything from answering questions and connecting consumers to the right resources to actually mediating disputes between consumers and utility companies on issues such as bill charges or energy contracts. The office also runs outreach events across the province to educate consumers and engage them in conversations on making informed energy-related choices. Through its website, ucahelps.alberta.ca, the office reaches about 200,000 Albertans every year with consumer resources and services, indicating strong support for this service and making a case as well for enshrining the regulations in legislation to ensure that they continue to serve Albertans no matter what the ongoing, long-term thoughts of a government might be.

One of the hallmarks of the UCA's activities is its work helping vulnerable Albertans maintain or restore utility services during the cold winter months. I know from my past experience as a real estate agent that there were properties which had been threatened with getting utilities cut off or actually had a reduced flow of electricity. They had a special meter on them. This method of obtaining some type of arbitration to ensure that utility services weren't interrupted in cold winter months was a great relief for those people who were owning the properties and also for families who were going through hardships, and utility bills were some things that were perhaps being left aside in order to buy groceries. The utilities they relied on to keep their houses heated weren't cut off. The UCA intervened and did help many, many families and homeowners with maintaining the utilities they rely on in the heating months.

Now, in partnership with the Alberta Utilities Commission, utility retailers and distributors and government agencies such as Alberta Works and assured income for the severely handicapped save many families from having to go through a loss of heat during the heating months. The UCA helps those at risk through the winter utility reconnection program. As part of this program the UCA makes multiple attempts to contact customers with disconnected utilities to help them get reconnected before the cold weather hits.

Another role the UCA plays is representing the interests of consumers at Alberta Utilities Commission rate proceedings. The UCA intervenes in dozens of rate proceedings each year, and since 2013 their interventions have helped Albertans save more than \$800 million on energy bills. That's a significant amount of money back in the pockets of Alberta consumers. Last year alone the evidence and arguments that the UCA presented to the commission prevented \$204 million in extra energy costs from being passed on to consumers. That, to me, Madam Speaker, is a huge benefit of having a Utilities Consumer Advocate in Alberta.

I'm proud of my colleagues for bringing forward this legislation, that will support and enhance the role this office plays and enshrine it in legislation. I'll leave my remarks there and thank my colleague once again for bringing this important measure forward. I look forward to encouraging all members of the Assembly to support the bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 208, the Government Organization (Utilities Consumer

Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017. This bill is simply making a redundant amendment to the Government Organization Act, schedule 13.1, which governs the Utilities Consumer Advocate's office. This amendment's only real function is that it now requires the advocate's office to disclose information, complaints, and investigations lodged against a distributor, provider, or retailer. It's just about as simple as that.

To spell this out more completely, the existing power of the advocate has now just been turned into a requirement. They will now be required to disclose, collect, and use information about a distributor, provider, or retailer that comes from the Market Surveillance Administrator, the Alberta Utilities Commission, the director of fair trading, and/or any other persons the utilities advocate considers necessary.

Now, I will be supporting this bill since it's really not all that controversial and it may in some ways benefit the consumers, but I do feel that it's just another version of the NDP paper-pushing, make-work projects. It makes the advocate, now required, do something that it can already do under the existing clause (c), "to inform and educate consumers about electricity and natural gas issues." I do think that this is a bit of a waste of the House's time and that this amendment is really just spelling out the same clause that was in there before but in more detail and at added cost.

I just hope that this won't distract from what is the most important role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate's office, which is supposed to be to represent the interests of Alberta residential, farm, and small-business consumers of electricity and natural gas in any and all proceedings or conflict. A question that should be asked and, hopefully, answered by this government is: will the advocate need to hire additional staff to make sure that all information is collected and disclosed and also continue to function as an advocate in proceedings and conflicts? Without providing the advocate with additional resources, this could prove to be onerous and distractive. Has the government thought about the financial costs? Where are you planning to get the extra finances from? Is this government planning on providing additional funds, or are they simply going to hand over the responsibility to the advocate's office? Are there any protocols in place to ensure that there is continued advocacy for those facing conflicts?

It's great that Albertans will have all the information and disclosures made available to them in one centralized place. This will increase awareness, and consumers should be informed about their options and any issues that others are facing in their communities. This will hopefully increase awareness and help them make important decisions about which power provider they would like to choose, but I still cannot see why this amendment is really required. I'm hoping to hear more about the reasoning that is behind this amendment during our debate time later today. Consumers do deserve to be informed about their options. However, I really don't see how this can't be done already by the Utilities Consumer Advocate's office under the current legislation.

Other questions that we have. Has the Utilities Consumer Advocate office been involved in the writing of this amendment? Did they request that this amendment be made? Was the advocate consulted, and what did that look like? These are some of the questions we have here on this side of the House. By no means are we saying that this amendment shouldn't be done. We just want to know if this is just another make-work project. Has the financial component of this been looked into? Or perhaps this is just another way that the government says that it's creating jobs for Albertans, because this bill will certainly create more work.

Saying all of that, Madam Speaker, our caucus will be supporting this bill in its present form as we feel that it does not add unnecessarily to any controversy, and I do believe that it will benefit

consumers. Just please answer the many questions that I and my colleagues and, I'm sure, everyone have looming in the back of their minds. It's not like this government has a glowing reputation in making the most responsible financial decisions.

Thank you.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: All right. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm about to rise and speak in favour of Bill 208, and I'd like to commend my colleague from – oh, jeez. I'm trying to remember the name of his riding.

The Acting Speaker: Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Piquette: Wetaskiwin-Camrose. He's nodding. I guess he knows that it's his bill.

I think this is an excellent bill. I'm actually very pleased to hear that the opposition will be supporting this bill, and I'm sure that the hon. member will be able to answer any specific questions they might have, you know, going forward.

As for myself, I wanted to concentrate on a couple of aspects of this bill that I find particularly useful and helpful, well, especially to the constituents that I represent in Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. I guess, personally, I wasn't aware of just how busy and active the office actually is in helping Albertans deal with concerns over their utility services, their utility billing, that the office reaches out to around 200,000 Albertans every year with consumer resources and services. It definitely shows that this is a very, very well-utilized service and, you know, very much a service that deserves to be protected and supported by legislation. I'd like to commend the member for making sure that this resource is available to Albertans.

Of particular interest to me, because unfortunately there are residents that I represent and, I'm sure, that other members do as well that are having some economic challenges – one of those challenges is, unfortunately, not necessarily having, you know, money at the end of the month to make all the bills. As all Albertans know, one of those bills that you need to make sure that you're meeting is your utility service during the wintertime.

You know, where you have vulnerable Albertans that have had their utility services cut off or maybe are in danger of that happening, I think it's just absolutely critical that we do have an advocate that, in my understanding, in partnership with the Alberta Utilities Commission, utility retailers and distributors, and, of course, our own departments – it's Alberta Works and assured income for the severely handicapped – works to make sure that those at risk are helped out through the winter utility reconnection program.

I mean, that's definitely one among other aspects, this absolutely critical role that the advocate fulfills. My understanding is that it's a very proactive approach that the UCA makes, that they will actually reach out and attempt to contact customers that have disconnected utilities and try to get ahead of the problem because, I mean, the very last thing I know any members want to see is Albertans facing winter without utilities. Unfortunately, some people are simply too proud to reach out when they need the assistance.

As a matter of fact, last winter, unfortunately, I did have one of my constituents whose utilities had been disconnected the previous fall, and somehow there was an issue where it kind of fell through the cracks. Now, to be fair, she might not have been on natural gas,

but in any event, I mean, she actually did freeze to death in her house. You know, this is something that is a tragedy which very much could have been identified and prevented. I'm just very happy to realize that, I mean, there is this program. Obviously, it's not one hundred per cent, but anything that the UCA can do to prevent this type of tragedy going forward is a huge plus.

Now, I know another important role that the UCA plays is representing the interests of consumers at commission rate proceedings. I think this is a very critical role because, you know, it's very rare for individual citizens to feel comfortable when you go up to this type of commission environment without some type of support. I know that in the past when I've talked to people who have to go through similar hearings, the language is opaque and the rules can be very complex and hard to understand, and it's really good to have someone on your side.

My understanding is that through their interventions the UCA has been able to help Albertans save more than \$800 million on their energy bills since 2013, which is amazing, and that last year alone the UCA presented the commission evidence and arguments to prevent \$240 million in extra energy costs from being passed on to consumers. It's in light of this type of information that I think, Madam Speaker, there is a huge benefit to having the Utilities Consumer Advocate in Alberta, and I think it's very, very important that it's protected.

My understanding is that this legislation, if passed, would indeed ensure that the government would have to return to us here in the Legislature in order to do away with this office. So it's not some sort of cut you can make and, you know, people don't realize it till it's done. I think it also speaks very strongly and centrally to what our caucus believes in, that it's important that we stand for the consumer and that it's important that we always work to make life better for all Albertans.

With that, I'd like to urge the unanimous support of this bill, and I think I'll rest my remarks there. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A lot of what I was really interested in in this bill, the Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017, a lot of the issues there have been raised by other speakers, which I am very happy that people see as we all are consumers of the various, you know, means of energy in our lives.

One of the things I really was impressed with about this bill was that it would serve to make sure that people were able to have better understanding of what their actual energy bills contain because – I mean, obviously, the winter utility reconnection program is great. The proaction that the Utilities Consumer Advocate, you know, is involved in is great. The fact that they work with the energy providers and government agencies, Alberta Works and assured income for the severely handicapped, is wonderful because when we see collaboration like that, there are fewer chances of people falling through the cracks. There's a greater likelihood of problems getting solved before they cause more damage than is necessary.

I like the fact, too, that this would see a means of enshrining this program in legislation. It's a valuable service. It provides something that is not a duplicate of anything else that's being done already, and it is really worth while having this enshrined. The amount of money it saved consumers, as many other people said, and the number of consumers it helped was absolutely phenomenal.

I really like the fact that it said that the intent of Bill 208 is to support the UCA to make the important information more visible

and accessible so that consumers can make well-informed energy choices. This is a really important matter. I find energy bills rather incomprehensible and have to make an effort to read them. I'm imagining someone with a lot less education or someone just not familiar with the kind of language used, and it would seem like a foreign language.

3:40

Also, people have a hard time – we all do sometimes – deciding what's a legitimate good deal when we're being offered one of the deals that companies commonly give us and what is just a means of getting us to sign up longer, sign a contract. So having a neutral, nonpartisan means of giving us information is really helpful.

I like the fact that the focus of the bill is on allowing Albertans to see operating records of energy retailers and distributors in areas such as customer service, compliance with laws and standards, history of enforcement actions, and history of complaints and major issues. These companies should be able to be transparent and have their history made public so it would help people better understand who they're working with and who they're engaging in business with.

The UCA provides such a valuable role. I'm totally supportive. Obviously, we want it to continue standing up for Alberta's energy consumers. I support this bill totally.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 208?

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to close debate.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all the members who participated in debate on this important bill. I really appreciate your thoughtful feedback. I want to reiterate that this bill is about consumer protection. It is about making sure Albertans have the information they need about their rights as consumers and reducing some of the anxiety and nervousness that many people feel about electricity contracts. Since the bill's introduction I have received a lot of positive feedback, and I really appreciate all of the discussion.

I have also met with the Utilities Consumer Advocate and had a good discussion with that office about the bill and how it can help them in their task of protecting Alberta electricity consumers. I was very impressed with the work that they do. The UCA office did not request this bill. They did not write it. They did not revise it. It is constituency driven. However, they were very happy and definitely supported it. They appreciated that being able to put the information in one place would be more efficient and effective for consumers who want information. Consumers did want details about their bills and disclosure of complaints about the companies and resolution of those complaints. The UCA agreed that that would be valuable information for them to have.

Also, the advocate did not see the need for additional staff. They handle 30,000 to 40,000 inquiries. This might change the nature of those inquiries, but the most important thing for them, in addition to the one place for that information, was – it may be just terminology – changing a regulation to legislation so it's "by law these issues can be resolved" as opposed to just "they might or could be resolved."

I enjoyed listening to all of the feedback. Yes, this bill was not meant to be controversial but just to support the work of the UCA's office in becoming more efficient and effective and letting consumers know that they would have protection. There would be somebody that they could appeal to. I want to ensure that this bill

provides the strongest protection possible for consumers. I look forward to the opportunity to continue the debate about consumer protection in the Legislature and hope that everyone will join in supporting this bill at its second reading today.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a second time]

Bill 209 Radon Awareness and Testing Act

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

Ms Luff: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very happy today to be able to introduce debate on second reading of Bill 209, Radon Awareness and Testing Act.

This bill does pretty much exactly what the title indicates. It seeks to raise awareness of radon here in the province of Alberta and to encourage more radon testing to happen.

The idea for this bill came about when my husband read a newspaper article in the *Calgary Herald* about the work of Dr. Aaron Goodarzi, who is a cancer researcher at the Charbonneau cancer institute at the University of Calgary. We quickly ordered an electronic tester for our home, and I also scheduled a meeting with Dr. Goodarzi to learn more about the issue. I would absolutely encourage anyone who hasn't had the opportunity to hear Dr. Goodarzi speak about radon to do so as I have yet to meet somebody who has been to one of his presentations and hasn't come out a radon awareness advocate. He's very passionate about the issue and does an amazing job of really identifying what the problem is. After that meeting I began hearing from concerned citizens, health advocates, and radon mitigation experts, and I knew that I had to do something to increase awareness of this very important public health issue.

Radon is a colourless, odourless, tasteless radioactive gas. It occurs naturally and is formed by the natural breakdown of uranium in soil, rock, and water. Radon that escapes from the ground into outdoor air is diluted to low concentrations and, as such, isn't a problem. However, radon that enters an enclosed space such as a home or a daycare facility can accumulate to a very high concentration. Radon gas in a home or any other enclosed space undergoes a process of change called radioactive decay, which produces solid particles that can be breathed into lungs. When these particles change, they emit a tiny burst of radiation that damages the cells inside of your lungs, and prolonged exposure to high concentrations of these particles can lead to lung cancer. According to the Surgeon General in the United States radon in the home is the second-leading cause of lung cancer after smoking.

Here in Alberta we're fortunate to have Dr. Goodarzi, who is doing research into this issue to establish a better understanding of the extent of the problem here in Alberta. In March of 2017 Dr. Goodarzi published a peer-reviewed study of radon in Calgary. The study was entitled Comprehensive Survey of Household Radon Gas Levels and Risk Factors in Southern Alberta. He tested the radon levels in 2,382 residential homes in Calgary and the surrounding townships. To quote from the report:

Our findings show that radon exposure is a genuine public health concern in southern Alberta, suggest that modern building practices are associated with increased indoor air radon accumulation, legitimize efforts to understand the consequences of radon exposure to the public, and suggest that radon testing and mitigation are likely to be impactful cancer prevention strategies.

The study found that 1 in 8 homes in the Calgary area had radon concentrations above the recommended level of 200 becquerels per metre cubed. This is a higher level than was previously thought to be present in Alberta and reason enough to increase awareness and encourage more Albertans to test for radon.

Cancer is the leading cause of death for both men and women in Canada, and the Canadian Cancer Society estimates that 28,600 Canadians will be diagnosed with lung cancer in 2017, that 21,100 will die from lung cancer, and that an average of 58 Canadians die from lung cancer every day. They state, "Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers and the second leading cause . . . in smokers." Health Canada estimates that radon exposure is linked to 16 per cent of lung cancer deaths, or more than 2,000 Canadian deaths, every year. Madam Speaker, the idea that 2,000 Canadians die every year because of radon exposure is shocking to me.

When I think about families and loved ones of those who have died from this horrible illness, it makes me very sad and very angry because many of these deaths could have been prevented. There are simple and inexpensive tests available to all homeowners that would tell them the radon levels in their homes. I ordered an electronic one that tells me the average. I can look at two different levels: I can look at daily levels, or I can look at the longer term levels. I have noticed that there has been a little bit of a spike since winter came. It's best to test for radon in the winter because that's when your heating is happening and you've got your windows and doors closed. It's recommended that people test between November and April of each year. These kits are available from local retailers and from specialized radon mitigation companies.

If radon levels are over the recommended limit, remediation is relatively safe and inexpensive. Every home is different, but the most common type of radon mitigation involves installing a vent pipe that lets the radon gas outside of the house instead of inside. The average cost for this mitigation is around \$2,500. Now, there are many private companies in Alberta that offer these services. Although there is a cost, I believe this cost is very low compared to the cost, both emotional and financial, of having a loved one or a family member be affected by lung cancer. As soon as I learned about this, I had my home tested, and I told other people, too.

But the sad truth is that most Albertans don't know about radon. They don't know the dangers that it poses, they don't know how to test their homes, and they don't know how inexpensive and easy it is to lower the risk for themselves and their families. Groups like The Lung Association of Alberta and the Northwest Territories and Health Canada do their very best to promote these risks, but so far it hasn't had a big impact in Alberta. A recent study has suggested that of all the provinces in Canada, Alberta has the lowest level of knowledge about radon and its dangers. To me, Madam Speaker, that's unacceptable and, to a certain extent, inexcusable. When we as legislators have the ability and the knowledge to improve the health of our constituents and we do not do so, we're not doing our duty.

3:50

There is much we can do. We can educate, we can encourage, and we can lead the way by requiring that daycare facilities test for radon levels, and this bill does all of these things. It requires the ministry to produce materials for radon awareness to encourage Albertans to test, and it requires child care centres to show that they have tested in order to renew or to receive a new licence. It's crucial for child care centres to test for this carcinogen because small children are more susceptible. They breathe more rapidly than adults and, as such, can inhale more radon into their lungs. I don't know a single parent, Madam Speaker, who would want their child spending significant amounts of time in a room with second-hand

smoke, and radon is no different. British Columbia requires child care centres to test, and this bill will require Alberta ones to do the same.

I'm also hopeful that this bill and the efforts of others will raise awareness to a point where parents begin to demand testing in schools as well. I didn't choose to mandate school testing in this bill because I think that it's important to respect school board autonomy, but I also think it's important to note that very few schools in Alberta have been tested for radon. Our neighbours to the east in Saskatchewan and also to the north in the Yukon have tested 100 per cent of their schools. However, according to the most recent data available, here in Alberta we've only tested 3 per cent of our schools.

In summary, radon is a naturally occurring gas that can be concentrated in indoor spaces and is the second-leading cause of lung cancer in Canada. As legislators we have a duty to act to protect the health of Albertans, and increasing awareness of radon will do this. Any time we can prevent cancer, we not only save our health care system money, but we prevent pain and anguish for Albertans and their families. Child care centres should absolutely have mandated testing because no parent wants their child in a room breathing in a carcinogen all day long.

Overall, I think this is a common-sense bill that will help to prevent lung cancer in Alberta and quite possibly save the lives of some Albertans. I hope and trust that other members of the Chamber will support this bill, and I look forward to the debate at second reading.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate being recognized today. I wanted to thank the hon. member for bringing forward this private member's bill. I think it's an important bill and an important topic to discuss, and it certainly has my support.

You know, it's interesting. My mom, Madam Speaker, who probably is not watching but just in case, is excellent, and I'm very fond of her. She was very good at cooking. You may be able to tell. She came to my house not too long ago, probably about a couple of years back – I've got two kids that sleep in the basement of my home; it's a renovated basement, and they've been down there for a while – and she starts talking about this radon thing. "This sounds like a bunch of hokey-dokey there, mom. Where are you going with this?" She was pretty passionate about it. She started to talk about all these statistics, which I think the hon. member did a great job of illustrating for the House. It's a serious thing.

I mean, it's the second-leading cause of lung cancer. I think all of us probably know people that have suffered from lung cancer in our lives that never smoked a cigarette in their lives. You often hear that. It seems to me that most of the people that I know that I've lost in my life to lung cancer often say that, too, because they didn't smoke, so there are other things causing that situation.

You know, mom went through that with me and talked about that, and she said: "You know, Jason, you've got a couple of kids living down in that basement. Have you ever tested your basement for this radon?" She went through in great detail about different testing products, Madam Speaker. I have a mother who is one of those people who spends their time on Google. If she's going to put some sort of testing thing into the basement, she will have spent more time than it would take to do the testing just to determine what would be the appropriate product to use to do that testing.

She did it in her basement, my childhood home, where I grew up, where my mother actually works in the basement. She had worked in the basement of that house for well over a decade, doing the work that she does. She put this testing kit in there for a period of time and got the results, and it turned out that the levels were really, really high, way above the recommended amounts that should be in a basement. Of course, she had been exposed to that for a long period of time and would not have known about it. The fix, as the hon. member pointed out, is actually pretty cheap, pretty easy to implement in a home or another area.

Also, where she works is the basement room that I spent most of my teenagehood in, and we would not have, of course, known about that at the time, me and a couple of my brothers that lived in the basement. One of the things, Madam Speaker, about having five brothers is that you all have to bunk together. There are some other stories there, but we won't get into that.

Then my mom took the kit, and she brought it to my house, and we did the test, the same thing, in my house. Our levels were actually low. As the member pointed out – for whatever reason, where our basement had been built, in our area the levels were not that high, but in her house it was. She proceeded to do that to all of her six boys' homes. She's more worried about her grandchildren, I think, than us, Madam Speaker. She proceeded to do that. It was interesting. About half of us had levels that were too high in our homes, and about half of us did not. It's that random.

My understanding as well is that it can be different very close by. Just because my house came in well below the limit or the recommended exposure limit does not mean that my neighbour on the next farm or my mother's neighbour would not have a different level. It does change, and it's important that it's checked for those homes.

I think the point that the member who brings this piece of legislation before us is trying to make is that most people probably did not have their mom show up and start installing radon detectors in their basement and checking how much their children were being exposed to it. The reality of that is because most people probably just don't know about this. I think that even in our caucus, when we saw that this piece of legislation was coming before the House, Madam Speaker, and we talked about it, probably only about half of us actually, really knew what radon was and the potential for significant consequences to one's health as a result of exposure to that product.

I think the hon. member talked a little bit about how easy the fix is, at least on the residential side. I don't know how much the cost increases for larger facilities, commercial facilities, municipalities, high-rises. I actually don't know. I do know that for a home, for a residential home, the ability of the kit to fix it is pretty insignificant in cost compared to the potential consequences, for sure, of not doing it but also the cost to the system.

As a conservative, Madam Speaker, I don't often rise in this House and speak about a member from the NDP caucus bringing forward a bill that I think is very conservative as well and is in a position to help save our system money in a positive way, but today I would like to point that out, that I actually think that in the end this legislation will save taxpayers money. It'll save our system money. It'll save our health care time. Something that I know that we talk about a lot in this House is the need to address the serious health care delays and the waiting lists and those things that our health care system faces. This piece of legislation, when implemented, over time, I think, will have a positive impact on those. Of course, it won't eliminate all of those concerns, but it will certainly have a positive impact, ultimately lowering costs.

I also think that it's important to point out, Madam Speaker, that Health Canada has already deemed radon a serious health risk, so I

think that we're talking about a fact that has been determined through science. I know that often the members across the way like to imply that this side of the House denies science. Maybe later on today they'll rise and point out that I'm not denying science. I'm recognizing the science behind this important health issue.

You know, Madam Speaker, I didn't actually get to hear all of the hon. member's comments, but one thing that shocked me was that in Canada 16 per cent of lung cancer deaths are attributed to radon exposure. Sixteen per cent of people in our country that are losing their lives because of lung cancer is because of something that costs, in most households, a thousand dollars or so to eliminate most of the exposure.

Again, at the same time, when you've got parents, often I think that – I don't know how it was for the members across the way, but lots of my friends growing up happened to live in the basement of the home. That's where you ended up going. In fact, Madam Speaker, I was pretty happy when I got moved from upstairs to be able to go down into the basement. When I was a teenager, I kind of had my own domain down there, and it was pretty exciting. But our parents certainly would not have known that they were potentially exposing us to hazards in the air that could have catastrophic consequences for us much later on in our lives.

4:00

I certainly think that the comparison to second-hand smoke was a fair comparison for the hon. member to bring forward. I remember growing up in my house, and people still smoked in our house when we were little. I couldn't even fathom that happening in my home, you know, not even with guests or anything along those lines. But it was pretty commonplace when I was a young toddler, and that's changed. Our culture and our society have learned about the devastating impacts of second-hand smoke, and we recognize that it's not appropriate to expose children to that second-hand smoke. It's one thing for adults to make a decision to risk their health and consume that product; it's an entirely different thing to have children, who can't make those decisions for themselves, be in a spot where they're exposed to second-hand smoke.

I think the other thing that we've learned is that it's not fair to those of us in our society, like myself and many others, who choose not to smoke to be exposed to second-hand smoke as we go about our lives. That's the same now for radon. Knowing the science that we know now, knowing the consequences that we see as a result of radon and the potential consequences to individuals and to their health, how important it is that we begin to look at that on the same level as second-hand smoke and that we take steps to make sure that, particularly, children are not exposed to that.

I think the hon. member also pointed out that children are most susceptible to it because of the way that they breathe and are developing. You know, add that together with the fact that they're not in a position where they can make choices for themselves – I mean, when my mom sent me down to the basement there, Madam Speaker, I really didn't have a choice. Even if she had had a radon test that showed that it was lethal, I had to go down there without delay, of course.

Now, I talked a little bit about the fact that it can't be seen, smelled, or that you would not know that you're exposed to it. As I was talking earlier, Madam Speaker, about the basement in my childhood home, where my mom works and where my room was when I was a teenager, we would not have been able to smell it, and there would be nothing visible to us or to our senses that would let us know that we were being exposed to this. That actually makes it different than second-hand smoke in a way. Well, it does make it different than second-hand smoke because, you know, with second-

hand smoke, you see it in the air, you can smell it, and you're being exposed to it.

Now that we know as a society the consequences of second-hand smoke, when I'm in a spot where somebody is smoking – you know, for example . . . [A timer sounded] I actually have another 10 minutes. [interjection] Yes. Thanks. That's okay. I know that members are excited about my next 10 minutes. [interjections] That's the reaction I get everywhere I go, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre is going to speak, and everybody is excited, I'm sure. I know I am.

You know, it's almost Christmas. Every year we have to go to my brother-in-law's house. My wife is going to kill me for telling this story. It's a good thing she's not in the gallery. They sit in their garage, and they smoke. They're smokers. They don't smoke in the house because they don't want the kids exposed to it. But the whole family ends up in this garage every Christmas. It drives me nuts because I don't smoke. I can't stand the smell of it. It's just no fun.

They sit in this garage, and it's like their hot box with cigarette smoke. Nobody bothers to open the darn door. They're all: hey, come in and visit; tell us how things are going. I don't want to go in there. My clothes will stink, you're going to kill me, and all that stuff. I know of the hazard, like I do now for radon. I can see that hazard, though, when I'm there. I know that if I sit in that garage all night, I'm being exposed to second-hand smoke, and I'm concerned with the consequences, let alone just the smell, Madam Speaker. I'm sure you can help me out if my wife is watching because I am going to be in trouble now at Christmas. Or maybe I'll get lucky, and they'll stop smoking in the garage. I don't know.

But I digress. The point is that I now could be in their home or in a new home that I buy and not have that ability, like I would for second-hand smoke, to be able to sense with my regular senses that there is danger as a result of the radon in the air in the basement. This legislation is extremely sensible because it puts us in a position where we could start to actually educate people about the dangers of radon and the consequences but also put in steps so that we could actually start to prevent that for people, particularly children. I do commend the hon. member for pointing that out because I think that is a valuable point.

Again, Madam Speaker, I think I will point out one more time, because I actually think that it's an important part of this legislation, the fact that in the long run it will actually save money. You know, we've talked a little bit, as I have been talking today, about the human cost that it will prevent. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud knows about that human cost probably more than many of us in this House.

Certainly, this legislation will help towards preventing that in the future, with fewer deaths as a result of radon. The generation that's coming up behind us will not be exposed to it in the same ways that we were because parents like myself now will be able to take steps to make sure that they're not, which our parents could not have because they would not have understood that.

It also is a win-win, which I think is rare to find in politics sometimes, where we are going to be able to save the system itself money, which will lower the number of people that are in the system as a result of lung cancer, dealing, of course, with the human cost and then taking pressure off the system, saving money for the system, in the long run creating more space for people that are dealing with other sorts of diseases to be able to come through the system because people have been able to put in something as simple as, you know, a \$1,000 kit in the basement of their house.

I am interested in – and maybe we'll hear more about it at future stages of the bill – the idea of how we would approach the education side of it, how we would be able to take the time. I guess, Madam Speaker, through you to the member, I can't get Mama Nixon to

stop by everybody's house, like mine, and install it and teach us all about the consequences. I mean, I kind of had nightmares the first night because she had us so scared of radon. It's important enough of an issue that we need to take the legislation through, make sure that we're requiring testing, requiring this important issue to be dealt with but that we're also taking time to educate people as to why so that they understand the dangers of being exposed to radon.

With that, Madam Speaker, I do think that my time is drawing near to an end. I think that it's something to . . . [interjection] What was that, hon. member? If you've got another idea you would like me to discuss, I'd be happy to discuss it while I'm up here. Yeah. I mean, it's pretty spectacular the time that we've spent together already, Madam Speaker.

You know, here is another one that I want to leave with you. There is a 1 in 20 chance of developing lung cancer if exposed to high levels of radon over a lifetime. A 1 in 20 chance is quite a bit. It's pretty significant when you think that we have people working in basements or sleeping in basements or in other areas that expose them to this. They have a 1 in 20 chance, and they don't even know it. They don't even know that it's in the air. They don't even know that that is taking place.

I think another important thing to point out, actually, before I finish, Madam Chair – I keep thinking that we're in Committee of the Whole today, and I don't know why; I apologize every time I call you Madam Chair – is that it's not just in basements. It can be on the main level of your home where you could be exposed to that. I think that the further up you go, the less likely it becomes. I think there's actually a point, from my understanding, where once you reach a certain height, it's a nonissue, but certainly it can be on the main floor of a home or on the second floor of a home or on the second floor of a commercial building that has a daycare in it. It's important that we look at it beyond just the basement thing, which is kind of my experience with it because of my experience with my mother when she was testing our basement. It's important that we recognize, which I think was the hon. member's point as well, that this is beyond just residential applications. It could be into areas where people could be exposed to something that is significantly dangerous for them.

You know, Madam Speaker, I think that given how dangerous this can be, given the significant consequences as a result of it, both the human cost to people and their families that ultimately will suffer from cancer as a result of exposure to radon as well as the overall cost to the system, which I think the hon. member did a good job of articulating, I can't see why any member of this Legislature would not support the hon. member's private member's bill. I personally am looking forward to voting with her on this piece of legislation at some point, and I certainly do hope that it will receive unanimous consent of this entire House and will go on to be a law, because I do believe that it will save lives.

Again, I just want to close with this, Madam Speaker. It is a conservative bill as well, which I am always happy to see.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 209? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

4:10

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Actually, thank you very much to the previous speaker as well as to the mover of this motion. I think this is one of the most important topics that we've had the opportunity to discuss in this House. As has been said several times already – but it certainly bears repeating – prevention of lung cancer is an imperative that we all should be aware of. Lung cancer is a

leading cause of death in Alberta, and whatever can be done to reduce the toll, which is very expensive – the cost of treatment of lung cancer, once it is established and diagnosed, is very expensive and, unfortunately, is not as successful as one would like it to be.

I basically want to amplify a few points that were made. I think that it's very important to realize that it took a New Democrat government in this province to bring this matter to the fore, and I don't think it's a coincidence. I think that what we're talking about as a New Democrat government is making life better for Albertans, and making life better means making our roads safe, making our schooling as good as possible, making our hospitals and other health care facilities as efficient and as effective as possible. When we think about this sort of thing, about public health, about ensuring that, for instance, vaccinations are promoted and that we promote exercise among the whole population, we want to basically follow the same precepts and, where there is evidence, try to eliminate things such as radon that might cause disease in young people.

I was just in contact with a constituent of mine who works for the Alberta Lung Association, and he's very pleased to hear that we're making progress on this. The Alberta Lung Association has long recognized that radon exposure is a preventable cause of lung cancer, and indeed about two years ago they initiated a program to give radon monitors to anyone who wanted them. I actually availed myself of that a year ago and installed the radon monitor in my own home, and about a couple of months ago I got the report that was facilitated by the Alberta Lung Association, my friend and constituent as well as the manufacturer of the monitors. Fortunately, the result showed that in my home there was less than 25 millibecquerels of exposure, well below the 200 limit and certainly way below the 800 mark, which means that you really need to do something about it.

I'm fortunate in that I don't need to be looking at making renovations, but I'm sure that for anybody that did this sort of thing, particularly if they have children, as was mentioned in the previous two speeches, modifications to your home may be necessary.

Now, I have another constituent and friend who used to be on the Edmonton separate school board. She's actually doing a master's in public health, and she chose as her thesis topic a dissertation on radon exposure in schools in Alberta. She just published her report. Basically, the report says what we've heard from the Member for Calgary-East, that radon exposure to young people is particularly a concern.

I thought I'd spend a few minutes just talking about why it is that young people are particularly at risk for this. It's related to length of exposure, if you have children in a daycare or in the basement, as was mentioned by a previous speaker, for long periods of time, where they're being exposed to radon gas over long periods of time, and those young children have a long life to live after the exposure. That's why these children are particularly at risk. Children also have smaller lungs than adults and smaller tracheas and bronchi, so these radon particles can actually get lodged in the adventitial tissue around the bronchi. Because they're radioactive, the radon actually decomposes into other substances which can be damaging to the lung. The longer that they are lodged there, the more likely they are to cause changes that would lead to cancer. So it is probably less important that somebody my age pay attention to whether or not they're being exposed to radon although that's still a concern, I'm sure, than a two-year-old or a five-year-old or a 10-year-old. The 10-year-old is, hopefully, going to enjoy at least 70 years of life expectancy after the exposure.

An Hon. Member: They're going to live to 100.

Dr. Turner: Well, we can make them go to 100.

The other thing that's key in all of this is that, basically, this is something where we have a duty to protect. We as legislators have a duty to identify public health risks, and if a public health risk like this is identified – and it's been identified by the University of Calgary as well as by the Canadian Cancer Society and by my friend Marilyn Bergstra, who was the trustee, as something that can be done. So I'm very pleased with the response of my colleague for Calgary-East in getting this done.

The other consideration I think that we need, that's important, is that every house will have a small amount of radon. So it's important in this education process not to make radon sort of a bogeyman and have effects on, for instance, you know, property values and other sorts of things. I think that we need to make sure that our population is educated about what radon is, what it can do if it isn't mitigated but also what can be done to make sure that these risks are abated. Certainly, the education aspects of this bill . . .

4:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 209. I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing this forward. I know that when I started reading through this bill and when I realized the issue that was being brought before the House, I knew very little about it. I think that probably one of the things that this House can do best at times is the education process, so I want to thank the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this forward if for no other reason than that it has helped to educate this Member of the Legislative Assembly.

You know, I remember standing in front of my kids in my classroom and talking about the benefits of a democracy and of a parliamentary system of democracy and saying to them that at its best in this Legislature the opposition is not just there to oppose for the sake of opposing. Good parliamentary procedure and good Legislatures are where the opposition opposes in order to make bills better. While we may disagree sometimes on whether a bill needs to be made better in this Legislature, I know that we have done our part to always try and bring forward amendments that would help the government to improve a bill. There are times when we can actually support a bill because it is a good bill. I think that this bill falls into that category today, so with sincerity I want to thank the Member for Calgary-East for bringing it forward.

Now, I said that I knew very little about this issue before the bill was brought to us and before I had a chance to read through the bill. It got me thinking about the times in my life when I was growing up, about some of the other issues that I can remember very specifically having to educate myself on and sometimes in not the usual ways. I can remember being in my high school when they realized that there was asbestos throughout all of the gyms and were having to shut down the gyms and having to bring in the workers and putting up vapour barriers and making sure that when they took that asbestos out of the gymnasium, it wasn't going to create a problem in the rest of the school, not knowing anything about it and just feeling really quite frustrated that I couldn't go to one of my favourite classes, which was phys ed, and having to find alternate arrangements and finding out that now we were going swimming and now we're going out and we were going to go to the hockey rink because we had to find alternate places to be able to go to and not really understanding the importance of the whole issue of asbestos. Now, as I've grown and matured and as life has taken place, I can see back, and I can see the real importance of that. We've had friends and we've had people in our community that

have passed away from asbestosis. We can see the real wisdom of the movement that was taking that material out of the schools.

I can remember that my dad, when I was about 13 or 14, purchased a car wash in Edmonton. As many times as we tried as 15-, 16-year-old kids to tell the people that were coming into our car wash that they couldn't leave their cars running when the doors were down, sometimes they just weren't willing to listen to a kid. While you know that there's a problem with carbon monoxide, it was never brought home more closely than when my brother came home one night and said that he had to rescue an individual that had gone down in the bay. He'd been busy pumping gas, and when he came in, he realized that this guy had left his car running. He had to throw the doors open and call 911 and bring the people in. We were able to save the man's life, but it really drove home the whole issue of carbon monoxide.

We need to be educated. I guess that's why I really believe that perhaps the most important function of this bill is going to be in the education of your average, everyday Albertan.

I think that all of us probably have grown up in situations where one or more of the family have been banished down into the basement when they became teenagers. I know that in our case it was because the bedroom that my brother and I shared was getting a little too small for the pride and the egos of the two boys that were in it, and we had to make a choice as to who was going to go down into the basement. Since I was the eldest, it was my job to take on that burden and to go down into the basement. Never did it ever come into my thought or into my parents' heads that that might be an issue.

I know that when we were just starting our family, we had three kids and two bedrooms in the entire 800 and some-odd square feet of the house. We had to have that debate. Could we put our five-year-old down into the basement? Now, I had no idea about radon, but I guess in hindsight that would have been a real easy decision. We made the decision not to because we thought he was too young. We went looking for another house where all of the kids could be on the same floor as the parents.

How many parents today, if they were aware of this issue with radon, would make the decision not to place their kids down into the basement at least until they had it checked? I really believe that the educational materials that could come out of this program and this act are perhaps the most important piece of this legislation. One year after passing this act, the materials will be going out to Albertan parents. I think that's going to be absolutely crucial.

Now, I'm really very glad that in the process of reading through this bill, I was able to learn that you have a 1 in 20 chance of developing lung cancer if you're exposed to high levels of radon radiation over a lifetime and that in Canada 16 per cent of lung cancer deaths are attributed to radon exposure. That's a human tragedy. Now that we know – at least, now that I know – this is a completely preventable thing, I believe this act moves us towards and in that positive direction that will allow us at the end of the day to save lives. I can't think of a more worthy thing that this Legislature could do than to save lives and to pass good legislation that will make the citizens of this province truly more safe. In this case I believe there's a very clear connection between the passing of this piece of legislation and increasing the safety of Albertans.

We've been told by hon. members already that children are at greater risk, and I don't know if there's anything that is more precious in our world than the children that we've been given. I know that I have yet to meet a parent in all of my long teaching career that would purposely make a choice that would harm their children. I believe as a legislator that the option in this case is very clear. We take the positive step. We support a piece of legislation that is going to make the lives of Albertans better.

Not only will this save lives, but at the end of the day it also reduces the costs that we'll face when it comes to our health care. Again, maybe not the primary reason why I would support this but a very good reason for supporting this piece of legislation. You know, we're going to have to make some really serious decisions. We've had the conversation, Madam Speaker, in this House about some of the decisions, about whether the government is making wise decisions in accumulating the debt and the deficits that we've had over the last several years. Well, here's an example where we can, with prudence and with wisdom, support a piece of legislation that may actually end up reducing some of our health care costs. That's a positive thing that needs to be considered.

We know that one of the reasons we can move forward with this piece of legislation is because there is a way of testing for radon radiation, and we know that it's possible to have radon detectors within the house. They can be used for a short period of time, I understand for two to seven days, or they can be for a longer period of time, over months, and that Health Canada... [Mr. Smith's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in support of Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act. I'll have to admit that I'm one of those people who, while I did know about radon gas, only had a vague understanding of it and not a real appreciation of the health risks of radon. I think that's particularly of concern to me because, as some members may be aware, I was previously an insurance agent. I actually used to do home inspections, and this was not something that we really looked for. It's my understanding that today most residential home inspectors don't actually check for the presence of radon. But, you know, after hearing the MLA for Calgary-East and some of the other comments in the House, I think I'm motivated to get a radon detection kit for my own house to see where my levels are.

As a government and as a caucus I think we've proven that we really do care about the health and safety of Albertans, and we've done and supported a lot of things that directly help to make Albertans' lives better and help them with their health. The first one, to kind of start off with a bang, is Bill 6, of course, which was about health and safety and at this point has helped over a thousand injured farm workers receive treatment and compensation for their injuries. We just passed Bill 19 this fall, and that will work to help protect the lives and safety of gas and convenience store workers. Of course, Bill 26 has just passed and will help ensure that Alberta is ready when cannabis is legalized by the federal government, and we'll work to keep cannabis out of the hands of children; protect public health; ensure safety on our roads, in our workplaces, and public spaces; and, hopefully and ideally, limit the illicit market.

Now, all of these are high-profile pieces of legislation dealing with things that are on the top of the public mind and often in the media, but unfortunately radon is not an issue like that. One of the reasons that I rise to support this and why I commend my colleague from Calgary-East is for the very reason that it is not something that's in the public mind, and it's something that ought to be.

Beyond a few news stories done last year – I know that the hon. member referred to Dr. Goodarzi and his colleagues at the University of Calgary, you know, where there was a little coverage of the reviewed radon levels in southern Alberta – there hasn't really been a lot of news about this. That could well be because it's

something that is kind of an out-of-sight, out-of-mind issue, just because, as the member said, it's colourless, odourless, tasteless, and there's no apparent way of knowing whether you have it or not unless you test for it. Surely, that's why it is so important for us to be talking about it here and why we should be bringing this forward to the attention of Albertans, precisely because it doesn't have that attention.

Now, radon gas is responsible for 16 per cent of lung cancer deaths in any given year. When we do have a simple and inexpensive test that can tell you whether it's been an issue for you or not, I mean, this is something that needs to be getting a lot more exposure. So I think it's really important that we bring this up.

A few important facts about radon that I was able to find out through this debate and in preparing for this is that there are a few myths that I think need to be dispelled. One that maybe I was guilty of – my house was built in 1976, so I didn't think there would be an issue for me – was that it doesn't really matter whether you live in an older home or one of the newer airtight types of homes. You find high levels in both. It doesn't matter what area of the province you live in or even what your neighbours' tests are at. I mean, every house is built individually; every house has its own issues. Every house, really, could be affected, so it's important that we make sure that we test for this.

Now, Health Canada has spent millions of dollars establishing guidelines and certification standards for mitigation specialists and on media campaigns to raise awareness, but unfortunately the message hasn't been getting through. I think it's really important that we do what we can to get that message out, you know, and I think that's a very good reason for why this bill is necessary.

For all these reasons, Madam Speaker, I think that it is important that this bill is passed and that Albertans are warned about the dangers of radon. Thank you to my hon. colleague for bringing this up. I hope this bill gets speedy and unanimous passage.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak in this House today regarding Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act. Obviously, youth are extremely important to all of us in this House, and I just want to thank the Member for Calgary-East. I will not only be encouraging my colleagues here in the Official Opposition to support your bill, but I'm so happy to be able to stand and support your bill as well.

It's so tragic that so many deaths have occurred from an odourless and tasteless gas like radon. The risks of radon are obvious, and so many people have died from lung cancer. I was truly saddened that so many people may have been living with such high levels of this disastrous gas in their very own homes, in a place that we are all hoping will be our safe haven. Every day we all go home to our houses, wherever that may be, to rest and rejuvenate and feel safe and be with our families, not ever thinking that there could be very serious concerns and dangerous radon within our own homes.

Madam Speaker, there's so much information on the Internet these days, but unless you specifically know or hear about something from a friend or on the news, you would rarely stumble upon something on this that could potentially save your entire family. So thank you so much for bringing this bill forward.

There are a lot of families that have lived in the same dwelling for many, many years, and they're breathing in the same air thinking nothing different, certainly not thinking that there are

gases or poisons in their homes. I mean, why would you? We don't go home thinking about the properties of air quality in our house – at least, I don't, anyway – or wonder about the long-term ramifications of that unless you can smell it or feel it or, you know, you can sense it. I've never truly thought a lot about that – I'm so grateful that you've brought this forward – and I bet most of us in this House have never thought about that. Day after day people go home to their safe place from the world, and they're not even aware that there could be poisons in their air and that it could be hurting their families. I'm so delighted to stand in the House today and support this legislation intended to educate the public so that Albertans can protect their families.

Now, about children and child care programs across the province. It is spectacularly important that they will also be protected just as soon as the legislation is proclaimed. That is fantastic news. Again, I just don't think it crosses a lot of people's minds. You're assuming that you're taking your children to a safe place, not ever assuming anything about the air quality. So thank you. This has been a really, really mind-opening discussion. Children spend, obviously, long periods of time in child care, and when they are there, it is absolutely imperative that those areas are being tested. Children have been reported to be at a greater risk than adults for certain types of radiation exposure. So I can't reiterate enough, I'm sure: thank you, to the member again, for bringing this forward.

The World Health Organization has material specifically for training the health sector on children and radiation, and it's actually pretty amazing when you think about it. That manual has absolutely everything in it from understanding the basic principles on radiation physics to identifying the source of radiation exposure right down to describing preventative strategies. So it really, really sets the tone and the availability to make sure that we're doing right by our kids in these spaces. It's super important to understand those basic principles for the pediatric health care system world-wide, actually.

One of the things, Madam Speaker, that the manual stresses is that "ionizing radiation is a known carcinogen to which children are particularly vulnerable"; that is, the effect of radon when there are high concentrations of this gas in enclosed areas such as a house or facility. This is when it becomes extremely volatile. It also says that when there is radon in a home or a building, "children may receive higher doses than adults because of higher intake and accumulation [and that] sensitivity to radiation is highest early in life."

4:40

Madam Speaker, our children are severely more susceptible to ionizing radiation that creates what's known as oxidative damage, or the free radicals, and that leads to recognizable changes in their cells and their DNA molecules. It's just terrifying. To think that children are at a higher risk and accumulate the radiation faster than adults is just horrifying.

There are also other pieces of information, Madam Speaker, that speak to the epidemiological studies that have shown that moderate to high doses of exposure to ionizing radiation actually lead to higher rates of cancer in adults. Again, I can't begin to explain how much more terrifying it is to know that our children are even more susceptible to this radiation than we are. Ionizing radiation has been linked to things like childhood leukemia, thyroid cancer, brain cancer, and radon has been, as some of the other members have, I think, mentioned earlier, linked to lung cancer. The studies of uranium miners have consistently shown that miners that have been exposed to high levels of radon are obviously going to be at an increased risk of lung cancer, but the actual statistics are staggering.

In 2007 Health Canada sponsored a workshop to review the current state of the science on radon health risks. The specifics of the workshops were to collect and assess scientific information

relevant to setting national radon policy in Canada. They gathered information on social, political, operational considerations in setting national policy. The workshop at that time, Madam Speaker, was attended by 38 scientists, regulators, and other stakeholders from Canada and the States. A number of strategies to reduce radon came forward in this workshop, including testing, mitigation of existing homes, and, really importantly, changing the building codes to require that radon mitigation devices be installed at the time when a new home is constructed.

We know that new homes are required to have radon detectors installed and roughed-in radon pipe should the home or building require removal. However, Madam Speaker, what is very concerning is that we know that old buildings may not have these remedial detectors and pipes. So it is imperative that the owners that are going to buy these properties are properly educated. As I understand it, under section 4 of the Child Care Licensing Act, prior to licensing any child care program, the facility where children will be will have to have radon testing completed the year before.

Again, I would like to take this moment to thank the member for her thoughtful bill, and I look forward to seeing what changes will be made in the regulations.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to speak to Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act. I just have to say to the Member for Calgary-East that the fact that the sole purpose of this bill is about educating the public about dangerous health risks I think is excellent. I think you've identified a very good subject. I agree wholeheartedly with this bill. Good job. [some applause] And that's all the kudos you're getting from me today.

Quite honestly, I do just want you to know that as soon as I heard about this bill, the first things that came to my mind were asbestos and carbon monoxide poisoning, some very similar, some very real issues that do affect us. Actually, when I thought about radon and read farther, I often think about house construction. I used to do house construction. I wonder how much the way we design homes here in Canada affects this compared to, say, in some warmer climates where they only build on a slab. Those were just some internal questions that I had.

The fact is that we do have to build these homes that are deep enough so that they avoid the frost, and we probably are digging deep enough that we are exposing our houses to the potential minerals, uranium, that produce this radiation. It makes me wonder, like, how much we have to do to alleviate these things in our houses. I see we've changed our building code, but we'll get back to that later.

Let us talk about asbestos and carbon monoxide poisoning, though. Carbon monoxide poisoning is something that fire departments across our nation have embraced, especially our Alberta firefighters. Up until recently they were handing out carbon monoxide detectors, which I strongly recommend people have in their homes. You have to remember to put those very low in your house because it is very similar to radon. In fact, it is a tasteless, not visible gas that is very heavy and stays low to the ground. Obviously, folks like the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre wouldn't have that issue because he's such a tall man, but Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills there might be affected by this greatly. This is no laughing matter, though.

Carbon monoxide is a very similar issue. Though we have some awareness of carbon monoxide – groups like the firefighters have

embraced this – there still needs to be more education on carbon monoxide. There is a push, perhaps, to make it a standardized thing, a mandatory thing, and I'm not sure that is necessary as long as everyone is aware and takes those precautions for carbon monoxide. Unlike asbestos and the other things carbon monoxide can kill you very quickly, even just a few hours of it. In Ontario they made carbon monoxide detectors mandatory because a family did lose a family member to a carbon monoxide leak just a few years ago. That's what instigated Ontario to push this forward. Again, the fire commissioner of Alberta has more than embraced carbon monoxide.

Asbestos. Here's another issue that was much more dramatic because we used asbestos for everything back in the day. It was a really good insulator. It actually has very good qualities to it. The unfortunate thing is that when you disturb it or it's in its form, it can easily be inhaled into your lungs, thereby causing a lot of obstruction to the oxygen and carbon dioxide exchange in your lungs. It makes things a little bit difficult. I've dealt with asbestos myself. You have to cover yourself from head to toe. You have to put on at a minimum an N95 mask, and you have to seal everything up. You have to seal the site up. It's a cumbersome issue, but it's well worth it to clear your home of such a prominent hazard within our homes.

I guess that's the point here. We continue to evolve; we continue to learn about all the different things that can affect us in our homes. Our homes are being built more airtight. We have very good windows. We have very good foam insulation that goes around any opening. We have paints and other seals that ensure that the air cannot escape anywhere from your home because we don't want that heat loss. That's a big energy issue. But the flip side to this is that we have to put things in our homes that exchange the air and whatnot. In the cases of some of these things like radon there's very much a need for that air exchange to occur.

Arsenic. Another issue that is very relevant. It's another carcinogen. It's something that we sometimes get from our groundwater. It seeps through. Obviously, it can come through the air and ultimately through our food as well. Arsenic is something that is very deadly. It very much kills us. Health effects include skin and lung and bladder cancers, liver, kidneys.

We know that because of the identification of a lot of these things like your arsenic, like your asbestos, we have different rules for different organizations. Health Canada, for example, continues to monitor the concentrations of various chemicals, and one of the things they do measure is arsenic. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency also takes a look at arsenic in all of our various foods, including baby foods and toys and things like that, to make sure that we are clear of this.

To the effect of radon: we do have extensive radiation laws, so I'm glad that this bill that is being put forward by the Member for Calgary-East is not imposing any hard laws – it is about education – because the fact is that there are laws out there that identify this issue. Certainly, the Radiation Protection Act; the radiation protection regulation; the Government Organization Act, schedule 10; and the radiation health administration regulation are all legislation that ensures that we're trying to protect our workers, our people, our citizens from radon. Again, so much more can be done, and that's why this Bill 209 has been provided by Calgary-East to increase the public's awareness, very much in the vein of carbon monoxide and asbestos. This is a good bill. This is education that we need to invest in and push forward.

4:50

I do hope, though, that when we're pushing these things, we can streamline things as well, make things more efficient. We shouldn't

always just be educating on radon. It can be done in conjunction with carbon monoxide. It can be done in conjunction with asbestos. It can be done in conjunction with anything else that we discover. Certainly, something to consider is how we educate people. Again, carbon monoxide isn't quite out there. We have some education on it, but people continue to be unaware. It's something that hurts us all. It's good education.

As houses get built and we're building sturdier homes – again, they're very high quality; they're more environmentally friendly in the fact that they don't allow heat and other things to escape – we have to be concerned that we can circulate that air and have a system of getting rid of this product. What I'm really happy with on radon is the fact that in 2014 the Alberta building code addressed this very issue. Basically, with this issue the only thing that a builder has to do when they're building their foundation is the submembrane. They're just putting some gravel. Before you might put some fill, even some sand, they're also asking for a layer of gravel, another substrate, which allows the air to escape in between those particles and to possibly vent it off if you were to rough-in a pipe into your cement. That is a good recommendation by the building code because it's very expensive and very time consuming to have to put these things in after the fact: breaking out concrete, hauling that out, digging holes, putting pipes in, putting in new concrete. I really like the fact that they addressed this a few years ago.

They talk about all the building objectives that builders must perform to alleviate this very issue. This bill is very much in alignment with that. I love it. The building code ensures that we do have a properly sealed and labelled radon pipe, and it discusses the width. It should be at least 10 cm in diameter. It should run underneath the floor up to the midpoint of the home. Again, if we do discover radon in that particular home, it's very easy to simply add a fan and a vent pipe to it.

You know, I fully support that these educational materials will be developed and will address all these issues. Again, like I say, if we can do this in co-ordination and conjunction with some other things that we are concerned about, like carbon monoxide, like asbestos, I think we have to continue on with this education.

Calgary-East, good job.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to mention a few other things when we're talking about radon gas. Again, it's been said many times that it's an unseen particle that we can't really detect unless we have the proper equipment. It has very long-term effects and is especially harmful to small children. I noticed in the bill that they're requiring child care services to do testing prior to getting a new licence, and I think that's a very good idea. A lot of the day homes and that: their basements are set up specifically for that purpose, and they have, you know, a bunch of little kids down there. I think it's a great idea to have that testing done.

Also, when we talk about these things, in the oil and gas industry we have what's called NORM, the acronym for normally occurring radioactive material. It can be very, very dangerous as well because, again, you don't know that you're even dealing with it. I was quite surprised. We had a stack of old drill pipe that was laying around, and we did some experimentation. We were actually looking for radon gas and radioactive materials. We got a Geiger counter out, and it was amazing how many of those pieces of pipe that people were handling – you know, a lot of times they're sold off to farmers to build corrals with and stuff, and these guys don't even realize

that some of this normally occurring radioactive material is in the pipe and inside the scale that's in it.

The other thing that really concerns me – and if there are any amendments to this bill, Bill 209, that I might add in, it would be also the testing for black mould. This is another thing that very commonly occurs in basements, especially damp basements. Again, you don't really know that you're being affected by it. I know that people can get very, very sick from it and have things that, you know, doctors can't even really tell what is harming these people. They've come up with all kinds of diseases, unexplainable causes. Then, I think that if you did some of the root causes – I know that down in the United States it's very, very difficult to get rid of black mould, and a lot of times they'll just destroy a home.

Again, if we're going to be testing for things like carbon monoxide, which is a great idea, and radon gas now, I think that is fantastic, but maybe something that we should be looking at also is testing for black mould in houses. I know that if I were going to buy a new home in the city or in the country or anywhere that had a basement in it, I would definitely be testing for black mould. Just a simple matter of not doing the right things, not getting the vapour barrier the right way in a basement or even in an exterior wall, can trap moisture. Once you get the drywall and the paint on top, you don't even know that you've got black mould behind there, but it's in the air and it's permeating your house the whole time that you're there. Especially, like I said, with small children around it can have a very, very harsh effect on them.

I agree with the member's Bill 209. I think it's a good step, but I think we could add a little bit to it and maybe throw in that black mould thing. What do you think?

Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for Calgary-East to close debate.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's wonderful to hear support from all sides of the House for this piece of legislation. I am always pleased when, you know, this private members' business can go well.

I just want to quickly mention a couple of things. First off, someone I think mentioned: what was the cost for larger buildings? It is true that the cost from radiation in larger buildings would be more expensive than the cost for an individual home although sometimes, like in the school that I was in, which was a very, very old building, it had vents in the ceiling, and it's just an issue of changing the pressure in the whole building. If you change the pressure from being negative to positive, you're going to push gases out instead of sucking them in. Sometimes these things in larger school buildings, especially older ones, can be remedied quite quickly.

Where to test? There were a lot of people who discussed the basement. The main purpose of radon testing: you want to put the test anywhere that you spend four hours a day or more in your home. If you're spending most of the time – my house doesn't have a basement, so we put the test on the ground floor because that's where we spend most of the time in the house. If you do have children in the basement, obviously that's the closest to the ground. That's going to be your priority. If you spend a lot of time on the ground floor of your house, you probably want to do that, too.

Where are the best places for education to happen? It is my great hope that every person who buys a house in Alberta will get a pamphlet that says that radon is an issue. I'm not opposed to the idea of other things. When you buy a house, that's when you're

looking at fixing things that could be wrong with it. I would sincerely hope – and I've spoken to folks with AREA and AFREA.

I'll end quickly by saying that I appreciate the thought that this was a conservative bill. If you appreciate prevention as a means of saving the health care system money, I'd just like to say that all of my Conservative colleagues should also appreciate supervised consumption sites and reduced air pollution from coal, among other things.

I'm very happy for everyone's support for this bill, and I hope for continued support at further readings. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a second time]

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Traffic Safety Act Amendments

510. Mr. Hanson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consult with physicians and optometrists and make recommendations on possible amendments to the Traffic Safety Act to address patients who in the opinion of a physician or optometrist have a medical condition that makes it dangerous for them to drive a motor vehicle.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's just another day. Sometimes we take that for granted, you know. Just another day.

That's how October 25, 2012, started out for the students, teachers at Racette junior high school in St. Paul. Then at 9:20 in the morning, without warning, a minivan driven by a man with severe chronic health issues plowed through the wall of a grade 6 classroom. It was estimated he was doing 80 kilometres an hour at impact. Three 11-year-old girls were severely injured in the wreckage. Eleven-year-old Megan Wolitski passed away from her injuries the next morning. Eleven-year-old Maddie Guitard, severely injured, never regained consciousness. She survived until August 31, 2016, and then she, too, succumbed to her injuries sustained in that incident. The third girl miraculously recovered though will carry the lasting effect from this incident for ever, as well as the rest of her classmates, her teachers, and indeed everybody in that school that was there that day.

Madam Speaker, shortly after I was elected, I was contacted by Megan Wolitski's grandmother, and I promised her that I would do whatever I could to prevent a tragedy like this from ever happening again.

Richard Benson, the driver of the van, had suffered from seizures for over a decade yet was still able to procure a driver's licence. Currently in Alberta doctors are governed by their own code of ethics when it comes to reporting patients that they feel may be a danger to themselves and the public and should not be driving a vehicle. In Saskatchewan it became mandatory in 2004 for doctors or any duly qualified medical practitioner to report anyone 15 years of age or older that, in their opinion, is suffering from a condition that will make it dangerous for that person to operate a vehicle.

British Columbia passed the same law, enacted as early as 1996. It says under the Motor Vehicle Act:

Report of health professional

230 (1) This section applies to every legally qualified and registered psychologist, optometrist, medical practitioner . . . who has a patient 16 years of age or older who

- (a) in the opinion of the psychologist, optometrist, medical practitioner... has a medical condition that makes it dangerous to the patient or to the public for the patient to drive a motor vehicle, and
- (b) continues to drive a motor vehicle [even] after being warned of the danger by the psychologist, optometrist, medical practitioner...
- (2) Every psychologist, optometrist, medical practitioner... referred to in subsection (1) must report to the superintendent the name, address and medical condition of a patient referred to in subsection (1).
- (3) No action for damages lies or may be brought against a psychologist, an optometrist, a medical practitioner... for making a report under this section, unless the psychologist, optometrist, medical practitioner... made the report falsely and maliciously.

The concern among physicians that I've talked to is the patient-doctor relationship. They're worried that if they report a person, word's going to get around, and then people will avoid going to that doctor. Currently the onus is on the doctor. Legislation would take the onus off the doctor. I've asked this question to the College of Physicians & Surgeons, and they agree that mandatory reporting would level the playing field for all doctors.

On December 9, 2016, the results of a public fatality inquiry into the death of Megan Wolitski were released. The inquiry was held in St. Paul on September 21 through September 23, 2016. Recommendations from that report support what I am asking for in Motion 510.

Madam Speaker, Megan and Maddie would be 16 years old this year and in grade 11. They should be joining sports teams, going on first dates, and planning their futures. Our current system failed them. Megan's family, Maddie's family, their classmates, teachers, school, and community were traumatized by an event that could have been avoided.

It is incumbent on us as legislators to do what is right to prevent tragedies such as this one and protect the public. Our current legislation does not go far enough to ensure public safety. I encourage all members to please support Motion 510 in memory of Megan and Maddie.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's kind of an interesting conundrum of feelings that I get when I rise in this Chamber because I was in the Chamber the day that the event happened, that my friend from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills talks about. I can specifically remember the exiting of the Chamber by the Minister of Transportation and the Member, at that time, for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills because they thought that something completely nefarious had happened. I may be incorrect in saying that it was the Minister of Transportation; it may have been the Solicitor General. But I remember back in that time that we had access to government aircraft just right nearby, over here at the municipal airport. There was a bipartisan joining together of the Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills member at that time and the other government member that went out to the scene, thinking that there was something extremely nefarious that had gone on.

As we've learned since then, it was simply a health issue of the person that had the health condition, and that contributed to the incident. But because of that, now we have people negatively affected by that, and my colleague now from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills is trying to seek proper, I will say, vindication, if you

will, or verification, possibly, of the seriousness of the event of that day.

I too have had constituents in my constituency of Drumheller-Stettler who have reached a ripe age of 80 years old and were completely of proper health. One gentleman that I know personally, who has now since passed, at over 80 years of age was trying to achieve and did achieve his class 1 driver's licence and maintained it to drive what we in the agriculture and the bulk carrier commodity industry, transportation industry know as a super-B. These are multiple fifth wheel units. I have the qualifications to drive one forward, but it's a whole other series of experience and whatever to try and back one up. This gentleman, although he was in perfect health, was running into a bureaucratic hurdle there to maintain his licence.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I think that my colleague's motion here to achieve proper professional medical adjudication of a person's health condition and achieve accountability for that condition is very important. I would like to stand with personal conviction. Because of my knowledge of the events of that day, I can stand here and ask for the compassion of the Chamber to support this motion and create full and open accountability for the doctors and the people that are, hopefully, going to be adjudicating the medical conditions of these people that are involved. I would plead for the passing of my colleague's motion as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to Motion 510? The Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise to speak in support of this motion. I want to commend the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for bringing this forward. I agree with him that this is important.

Now, I can speak directly to the case that brought his attention to it in a moment, but prior to that, I mean, I guess I just referenced it in my last speech that I used to be an insurance agent. As an insurance agent representing communities where you did have people with some health concerns, maybe sometimes you had elderly drivers that really shouldn't have been on the road.

There's one thing I can say, that a process I sometimes would find frustrating myself is when you'd have a motor vehicle operator that you knew was unsafe to be continuing driving, and you didn't have concurrence from the local physician for whatever reason, that there really weren't any resources available. Now, for myself I'd end up, depending on the severity of it, actually trying to get the family into the loop and trying to have those types of discussions, but as many hon. members are well aware, I mean, it's a very delicate matter when you're talking about someone's driver's licence, especially in rural areas. There's a lot of resistance. I mean, pride is one thing, but the health and safety of people is another, and unfortunately the second one should probably trump the first one.

There's another issue when you have unsafe operators that continue to drive. Members of the Assembly may not be aware of one of the qualifying questions when you get issued an actual policy for auto insurance, that the onus is on the individual to disclose any health conditions that may affect the safe operation of an automobile. If they fail to do so, the company may be at the discretion of denying the claim. There might not actually be liability coverage in situations like that, so it can be a very grave situation indeed.

Now, it is my understanding that officials in the Department of Transportation are already at work on this issue. Of course, we are unfortunately and personally well aware of that, you know, terrible, tragic death in St. Paul just over five years ago. You had a driver who was noncompliant with seizure medications and did not disclose his medical conditions to the registry of motor vehicles as required. This type of tragedy is preventable, and we need to take action to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

Today, as it stands, if a physician deems a patient medically unfit to drive, the physician can indeed report that individual to Alberta Transportation. Canadian Medical Association guidelines recommend that a physician report to the provincial registrar any patient they deem to be unfit to drive. Now, I understand that Alberta Transportation has been working with Alberta Health as well as with the College of Physicians & Surgeons and the Alberta Medical Association to make such reporting a mandatory practice. I also believe that it's very important that affected groups, especially seniors, are included in these conversations so that there are no unintended consequences to these changes. There are some very delicate issues that are at play with this.

Now, we must continue this important work. I would urge members of the House and government to continue working to achieve the desired outcomes of the motion by considering all means at our disposal, including regulation changes and potential updates to legislation. With that, I'd like to rest my remarks, once again commend the member for an important motion, and urge that it be supported.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Speaking to Motion 510, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Yes. Thank you. I am pleased to rise and speak in support of this Motion 510. I'm very aware of this topic given my profession as a physician. I think that the intent of this motion is very good, but it's going to take a lot of consultation, as was mentioned by my colleague just before me, to fashion a response. That's actually the purpose of this motion, as I read it, to go to the Ministry of Transportation and ask them to expedite a process in which a scientific approach to this vexing problem can be taken.

There is a real problem here. This motion actually has "physicians and optometrists" in it. I have to say that it's 99 per cent physicians and 1 per cent optometrists. Going through my mind now, medically I can't think of a medical situation that an optometrist could identify other than poor vision, which we already have taken care of. Actually, on my driver's permit – I'm a class 5 – it says that I cannot operate without corrective lenses. I don't think that an optometrist would have been able to, for instance, detect the issues, that the member mentioned, that led to the tragic events in Cold Lake.

The situation that did occur in Cold Lake actually involved a person with a seizure disorder. These are relatively common. In fact, seizure disorders can occur in childhood, or they can occur after trauma. For instance, if somebody has a brain injury, then a seizure might be the result. It can also occur, you know, with the presence of a tumour in the brain. The onset could be either in childhood, or it could be well into adulthood. If it is diagnosed, it is a reason for the privileges of operating a motor vehicle to be rescinded.

In my experience – and this is something that I do not have a lot of personal experience with – patients who have a newly diagnosed seizure disorder are routinely told to give up their driver's licence, and those persons that are told to give up their driver's licence are severely affected in terms of their quality of life. They then become

dependent upon friends and relatives for transportation. This is particularly, I think, a problem in areas like Cold Lake, where there may not be public transport available like there is here in Edmonton and in Calgary and other larger cities. A point to remember when we're discussing all this is that besides making sure that the doctors and optometrists are reporting these things, we as a government have a responsibility to make sure that the situation doesn't occur where somebody would try to get around those rules and operate a motor vehicle inappropriately.

In fact – and this is speculation on my part – I think that that was a large part of what led to the difficulties with the Cold Lake thing.

Mr. Hanson: St. Paul.

Dr. Turner: Sorry. St. Paul. They're close together, aren't they? Yeah.

The individual, I think, may not have been compliant with medications that would have suppressed the seizure disorder that led to this situation. Again, that's speculation on my part. I don't have any factual information about that. There may have been situations – for instance, a lack of sleep or consumption of intoxicating materials – that might have exacerbated the tendency for a seizure to occur in a particular situation. Even going without eating for more than 90 minutes can actually make a person more likely to have a seizure than they would otherwise be.

5:20

I'm not making an excuse for the doctors in this situation – that certainly is not my intent – but I'm actually trying to give you some context to think about how difficult it is in a situation like that for a family physician, for instance, or for a neurologist or a neurosurgeon or a cancer doctor, like myself, to be able to make the judgments that are being asked to be made in this situation.

I think that probably the strongest part of this motion is that we ask the Department of Transportation, the Ministry of Transportation, to basically consult with various groups such as the Alberta Medical Association or the Alberta family medicine association to come up with suggestions. They should also consult with the patient support groups. There is a large epilepsy association in this province. There's also a brain injury group at the Glenrose, for instance. Louise Miller is actually the most famous Edmontonian that I know of who works with people that have a brain injury. These groups would have a lot of very valuable information to bring to the table to make our roads safer and to protect the quality of life of the persons that have epilepsy or brain injuries or other things that might lead to this situation.

While I'm fully in support of this, I think it's important to recognize that this is a problem that the province has been dealing with for a long time. Certainly, physicians have been dealing with it for a long time. I learned about it in medical school. I get reminded about it regularly by the Alberta Medical Association as to my responsibilities in this regard as well as by the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta, and I dare say that the optometrists might get the same advice from their colleges.

I think, with that proviso, I will end my comments on this article. It is an important step in managing transportation safety, but we need to strike a balance between the individual's transportation needs and the public's right to road safety and to basically live with that. If we do monitor the driver's fitness as well as safety records and their medical conditions, Alberta's roads can be made safe, and that will make life better for all Albertans.

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

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for providing us a bit of a doctor's perspective on this particular motion. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for bringing forward this motion.

I think it is a good motion, and, you know, I'd like to share a little bit with the House as this is something that is particularly timely for me personally. As some of you may know, I have a grandfather who is 87 years old. Any time somebody loses a driver's licence, particularly, for example, if a doctor says, "Hey, perhaps you need to go and retake your driver's test," if you are somebody who has lived your whole life as an independent person who survived the Great Depression on a farm, was able to raise your family and then to see your grandson becoming a legislator, as you can imagine, it is always extremely rough on somebody's dignity and independence of being able to travel around when you need your grandson to drive you to the registry office to go take a driver's test and then inevitably fail that driver's test and have your grandson again drive you home from it.

It is important that, you know, as we think about this, we think about, particularly with seniors, keeping in mind that driving is often that last piece of independence. I find that this is sort of an observation in my constituency. When a person loses a driver's licence, there are consequences to that. I'm going to talk about this again from the context of seniors. When somebody loses their driver's licence, perhaps even temporarily, this might be the first time somebody might have to come to grips and admit the fact that they are old. I know this is something my grandfather is struggling with.

You know, some things were mentioned. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud mentioned that when people are talking to a doctor about the problems they may be having, whether you are an elderly person or a younger person with some other medical condition, you might have a fear of admitting your problems to your doctor for fear that they might send a letter off to the director of transport and you might lose your licence. That is what happened to my grandfather, and he is living those consequences right now. He chats with me and my family regularly about not wanting to go back to his doctor because he's afraid of what other consequences may come out as a result of that.

I get that we need to make sure that our roads are safe. The hon. member, when bringing forward this motion, mentioned a very tragic incident with an individual who, you know, sounded like they definitely should not have been driving, and I don't think anyone in this House is going to argue against that. Certainly, I would not either. Again, particularly with seniors, sometimes in the past it's also been family members that have reported individuals who are seniors: you know, perhaps it should be time for grandpa to retire the keys.

Again, that is also a very tough conversation to have because, like I said, that can be a very big hit to the dignity and independence of a person who might not respond well to that, which creates some family tensions that might prevent other care and help that that person needs as they grow older to happen in a nice way. I mean, these, of course, are all problems that need to be dealt with, you know, within the family and with that person.

This is a story that I've heard before. I have Bow Cliff Seniors and Good Companions 50 Plus Club in my riding, and I have heard this before. This seems to be a problem that seems to be particularly prevalent with older men, and it's something that we have to deal with.

Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, that is why I really appreciate that your motion as worded, although it comes from a very tragic incident, is also very calm and nonalarmist about

making sure that we do have to consult with doctors and optometrists to make sure that there's, you know, consultation to work through all the potentialities of this, particularly, I think, when it comes to our seniors on when it's time for a doctor to say, "Hey, perhaps I'd like to make a restriction that you can't drive at night anymore" or "Perhaps I think it's time for you to go re-evaluate the driver's test."

5:30

I appreciate that your motion has that built into it, that consultation, and isn't being alarmist, you know, from that tragic event. That tragic event did shine a light on this problem, and I'm definitely supportive of that consultation going forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will end my comments there. Again, I thank the member for bringing forward this motion, and I thank the member for making a very good motion that I think will help with consultation and will allow us to, you know, explore this issue and come up with a solution to it that I think takes into account some of the things we've heard from other members across the House today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any others who would like to speak to Motion 510?

Seeing and hearing no one, I would allow the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills to close debate.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I'd like to make a couple of comments. Maybe the choice of wording when I used "optometrist" – what I was trying to do was match legislation with our neighbouring provinces. But perhaps we should use Saskatchewan's, especially with the upcoming use of nurse practitioners. Theirs actually states that any duly qualified medical practitioner can make that decision. We could definitely go with that. But that'll be part of the whole collaboration and consultation on this process.

I'd just like to also mention that my mother passed away a few years ago. She had COPD, and she was on very high levels of oxygen for quite a few years. She loved to drive. She loved to go to bingo, loved her little car. As a matter of fact, I helped her out and bought her a car so that she would have something dependable to drive around in.

But she had this condition where she had a bottle of oxygen with her all the time. Her doctor recommended that she stop driving and go for a test. She was quite upset about that because it took away her independence. You know, she used to pick up her friends. She was the go-to for bingo, right? She could pick up a couple here and there, and they'd all go out and enjoy their bingo.

When she had her consultation with her doctor, he asked her: how long would you last if the oxygen line got pinched or if you hit the brakes and your bottle fell over and became disconnected? That was all it took. She knows that if she doesn't get that bottle changed right away, she's not operating at a hundred per cent by a long shot. You know, she almost took it upon herself – she realized at that point that she was dangerous to herself and to other people. I think that's very important.

I mean, this whole exercise and even the bills in B.C. and Saskatchewan start at 15 years old. This is not an attack on seniors by any means. This is an attack on anybody that has a condition that's going to really affect their ability to operate a vehicle, their safety, their own personal safety, the safety of the kids riding in the vehicle with them or an oncoming vehicle if something happens and they have a seizure.

We saw in the case there in St. Paul, very tragically, how it's disrupted – I guarantee you that there are kids in that school that will never ever recover from that incident mentally. It is horrendous that they had to go through that. If there's any way that we can put through legislation that's going to help to avoid a situation like that, somebody else having to go through that kind of a tragic event, especially, you know, kids in grade 6, 11 years old – I don't know how much more I can say about it.

But I really do appreciate that I think the members opposite are going to support this motion. I really appreciate that. I think it is a

good motion. I think it's something we need to look at as legislators. Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 510 carried]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point, given the amount of progress we've made this afternoon, I'd like to move that the House adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:35 p.m.]

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