



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, December 5, 2016

Day 57

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Second Session

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

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

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Carson	Jansen
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Kazim	

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Kazim	

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Drysdale	Rosendahl
Hanson	Woollard
Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 5, 2016

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us reflect or pray, each in our own way. On December 3 it was International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Let us take a moment in this Assembly to recognize the accomplishments and significant contributions of people with disabilities to this province. Their diligence, their courage, their perseverance ought to serve as a model for all of us on the need for recognition of all persons.

Mr. Halvar De La Cluyse Jonson
August 14, 1941, to December 2, 2016

The Speaker: Hon. members, as is our custom, we pay tribute on our first day to members and former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met. With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of the families who shared the burdens of public office and public service that we all understand.

Halvar De La Cluyse Jonson was with us from August 14, 1941, to December 2, 2016. Mr. Halvar Jonson was first elected as the Member for Ponoka in 1982 and was re-elected five additional times in the constituency of Ponoka-Rimbey, serving for a total of 22 years.

Over those years Mr. Jonson served as Deputy Chair of Committees from 1989 to 1992, Minister of Education from 1992 to 1996, Minister of Health from 1996 to 1999, minister of health and wellness from 1999 to 2000, minister of the environment from 2000 to 2001, and minister of international and intergovernmental relations from 2001 to 2004. In 2006 the brain injury ward of Alberta Hospital Ponoka was renamed the Halvar Jonson Centre for Brain Injury in his honour and for his long-standing community and public service.

Let us each take a moment of silence to reflect on Mr. Jonson 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 invite all participants to sing in the language of their 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: Thank you.
Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, with our collective 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 on your behalf members of the Jonson family, who are present in the Speaker's gallery. Please rise as I call your names and remain standing until all are introduced: Tamara Jonson Shepherd, daughter of Halvar Jonson; Trent Jonson, son of Mr. Jonson; and

the important people, grandchildren of Mr. Jonson, Solomon Shepherd, Cyrus Shepherd, and Sloane Shepherd. On our collective behalf thank you for your service to the province.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I believe that you have a guest, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've got a couple of guest groups to introduce. The first that I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly are 15 hard-working Treasury Board and Finance staff members. These TBF staff join us from a variety of business areas and professional backgrounds. They keep everything running smoothly in my department. I cannot thank them enough for the work they have done and their expertise in getting the job done. I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, I may have jumped too quickly. Were there visitors or just guests today?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the public gallery we have 24 students, a teacher, and three parents from the nicest riding in Edmonton, Edmonton-Whitemud. The students are from Earl Buxton school. They're accompanied by their teacher, Laura Wenger, and their chaperones, Ruth Olson, Joel Gehman, and Maged Sabry. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance, you had additional guests?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. For the introduction of some special guests it's my pleasure to introduce to everyone a couple of groups of guests. They're the people accompanying them and then the actual guests they have with them. It looks like it's from a crosscultural background. Ms Shelly, Mr. Rob, Ms Andrea, Miss Belinda, Miss Stephanie, Mrs. Inna are the chaperones; and then Karina, Kimberley, Danielle, Sarah, Lois, Jessica, Lan, Travis, Darlene, Christine, and John. If they'd all stand up, we'll give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

1:40

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly five guests from Canadians for a Civil Society who are visiting the Legislature today in recognition of Human Rights Day. First of all, Dr. Kristopher Wells, who is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education and faculty director for the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta; Doug Stollery, who is the chancellor of the University of Alberta and is currently serving as a member of the legal team challenging certain discriminatory criminal laws in Jamaica; Dr. Mona Nashman-Smith, who is the principal and CEO at the Edmonton Islamic Academy and who led the development of the Global Women's Leadership Forum and through her work in international education received the most excellent order of the British Empire from Queen Elizabeth II; Judge Robert Philp, QC, who is the chief commissioner of the Alberta Human Rights Commission; and Charan Khehra, who is a director for Canadians for a Civil Society and the proud cofounder of Daughters Day, which celebrates the lives and achievements of all women. I see they have all risen, and I would

ask that they receive the warm welcome of this Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group of medical students who are here from both the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. This morning I had the pleasure of meeting with Amy Li, Kieran Steer, and Adom Bondzi-Simpson. They are all going to be fantastic doctors one day. Just for your information, since 2009 students from the faculties of medicine at the U of A and U of C have held annual advocacy days here at the Legislature. Today the primary topic that we spoke about was their hopes for greater integration and intervention of mental health supports in primary care through complementary health practitioners, including psychologists. These leaders make me very excited about the future of our physician workforce. I ask that Amy, Kieran, Adom, and the nine colleagues that they're here with today please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. I believe they're behind me.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll complement those that the minister has introduced. This is Alberta medical student political action day. Even the medical school has learned about advocacy.

It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you some remarkable medical students from the universities of Calgary and Alberta, talking with MLAs in support of the Alberta medical students action day and focusing on the need for greater intervention and primary care as well as addictions support and the need for stronger curriculum in medical school to enable family doctors to take on some of these challenging cases. I can only hope that their efforts are as successful as last year, when they were here to advocate for improved vaccination rates, Mr. Speaker.

With us today are Sina Marzoughi, Joshua Nash, Kieran Steer, and Amy Li. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane. I believe you have some brief introductions.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Stephen Legault. As program director of Crown, Alberta and Northwest Territories and founding member of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative Stephen has advanced protections for some of the most ecologically important mountain landscapes in North America, including the Castle watershed. Stephen and Y2Y are valued partners in our government's work to conserve wild spaces and were instrumental in helping me craft Motion 511, regarding managing and conserving public lands to ensure Alberta's water future is secure. I'd like to ask Mr. Legault to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, there is a long list of guests that I have here today. I'm going to encourage brevity.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of individuals from an organization called *Diversity* magazine. Joining us here in the gallery today are Frankline Agbor, Gisèle Ndoungo, Albert Fernando, Jud Dudley, Mary Thomas, Ibraheem Kolawole, and Monika Siepietowska. *Diversity* magazine was the fantastic idea of Frankline Agbor in December 2014. The purpose of the publication is to highlight inspiring activities of various ethnic communities in Edmonton, of which Edmonton-Decore has many. I would like my guests to please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Cynthia Lazarenko and Beryl Scott. Cynthia is a former social worker and a strong advocate for the rights of seniors. Beryl is a retired registered nurse with 40 plus years of service and a vice-president of the Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation. I would ask that my guests rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of introductions today, but I will be efficient. First, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Barb Burgemeister, who is here today from Hanna. She is receiving the 2016 Stars of Alberta award. She will be one of six recipients of this award this year for her work at the Hanna Food Bank and the Center Street Thrift Store as well as the community garden. Through you I extend the congratulations of this entire House to her and ask that she receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you today Charlotte Preston and Richard Preston along with their grandchildren Chance Scott and Colby Scott. They hail from the Hanna area. If you ever meet anybody from Hanna, just ask if they know the Prestons. I assure you that they will. Richard is currently a councillor in Hanna and was a long-time employee of Sheerness power. Colby and Chance are great hockey players and have excellent 4-H projects that I always enjoy seeing when they send me pictures. I ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Last, Mr. Speaker, with the Preston family is Charlene Preston, who is my senior constituency assistant in the great riding of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. She used to work for the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler until she was stolen by the former Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. I'm happy to say that right after the election in 2015 I managed to convince her that Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre is the greatest place in Alberta to live. I would ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three local community advocates: Leo Campos-Aldunez, an adult educator, community animator, and media consultant who provides leadership and support to nonprofit organizations; Paula

Kirman, who is well known for both her photography and her work in human rights, reconciliation, and peace with the Edmonton Coalition against War and Racism and the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action; and Brenda Requier, who was diagnosed with MS 23 years ago and has been a strong advocate for the health care needs of persons with multiple sclerosis. I would ask that all three guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Government House Leader with a request for unanimous consent? I have a list of other guests.

Mr. Mason: You read my mind, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Colleen Ring and Curt Clement. Colleen is a long-time social justice and peace advocate, and in 1995 she introduced the Random Acts of Kindness Week initiative to Canada. Curt is a vice-president with KPMG, and he supports various community organizations and serves on the board of directors of the YMCA of Northern Alberta. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions to make. First, I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Paul Finkleman. Paul is the only Calgary recipient of this year's 2016 Stars of Alberta award. Paul has been active for decades as a volunteer, from organizing Calgary's first Earth Day activities as a high school student in the '70s to being the president of the Weaselhead preservation society. I would ask that Paul please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we mark Human Rights Day, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you some extraordinary members of Canadians for a Civil Society. I'll ask that they rise as I say their names. Ruby Littlechild is a strong advocate for indigenous inclusion in the economy and empowerment of women. Amrita Gill is an educator in the area of immigration and settlement and played a key role in co-ordinating the 2015 Daughters Day. Carrie-Lynn Rusznak is vice-president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and chair of the Human Rights Committee. She is a strong advocate for human rights and increased participation of women. I'd ask that everyone please extend the warm welcome of the House.

1:50

The Speaker: Welcome.

My apologies, Member for Calgary-Glenmore. I believe you had some other introductions.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Dr. Amrita

Mishra and Vasant Chotai. Dr. Mishra is a sociologist by training and public policy analyst by vocation and is currently a project director at the Indo-Canadian Women's Association. Vasant is the vice-president of Canadians for a Civil Society and a director of Public Interest Alberta. I would now ask if my guests could rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House Renée Vaugeois, the executive director of the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights. She is also the president of Alberta Hate Crimes Committee and a director for Women in International Security Canada. She has spearheaded many initiatives to strengthen community-based human rights advocacy and systemic change, including a coalition of individuals and organizations under the banner of racism free Edmonton. I ask my colleagues to join me in welcoming Ms Renée Vaugeois here in the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Environment and Parks and the climate change office.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the executive director of CPAWS, northern Alberta, Alison Ronson, and 60 grade 3 students from Elmwood elementary school and their three teachers and several parent chaperones. These students have been studying wildlife, and they joined us today to present a postcard campaign asking the government to continue their work preserving caribou herds. Minister Eggen and I were happy to see their hard work earlier today. Please extend to these special guests the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly, and I'll ask them to rise.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly advocates and family members of the residents of the Good Samaritan Mountain View Centre in Hinton. They are here today in support of long-term care spaces in Hinton. Please rise and remain standing as I call out your names: Lynda Jonson, Ron Jonson, Jim Chell, Marilyn Carling, and Brendalee Raketti. Can you please join me in welcoming my guests so that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other guests for introduction today? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Sandra Azocar, executive director of Friends of Medicare, and Joel French, executive director of Public Interest Alberta. They've been working with bloodwatch.org to support the voluntary blood and plasma system in Alberta and across Canada. Can the Legislature please provide them with the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In honour of Human Rights Day I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all

members of the House Dr. Shyamala Nagendran. Dr. Nagendran is a professor specializing in computing sciences in informatics on medical education. She passionately supports women's education and is a mentor to many. She serves on the boards of the YMCA of Northern Alberta, Visions Global Empowerment, and Lifelong Learners Association. On top of this, she is the founder of Natya-Size Fitness/Wellness Club, the club's focus being holistic health and wellness. Dr. Nagendran is seated in the public gallery, and I see that she's standing, and I ask now that she receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Oral Question Period

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

Child Protective Services Review

Mr. Jean: Children in care in Alberta are being very badly served by this government. For weeks we have been asking questions, and we get platitudes but no real answers. Now the NDP has announced an all-party committee. I will remind everyone that the previous PC minister struck a special panel to review these same matters, and they reported back in the spring of 2015. It appears nothing at all has changed under this government. Will the minister commit today that he will appear before the all-party committee and actually give answers to questions on what has changed since Serenity's death?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the important question. I recognize that it's a very important issue for all members of this House and all Albertans, and the Premier has asked me to move forward with a committee with members from all sides of the House. We are working on the terms of reference, and I will have more to share within a matter of days. We will work with everyone to make sure that we get this right.

Mr. Jean: Every piece of information we have suggests that what happened to Serenity broke all sorts of Human Services' policies and rules. We know kids in care are supposed to get a visit every single quarter. But, outrageously, indigenous children are more than one and a half times as likely to have gaps of seven months or more between face-to-face contact with their caseworkers. In Serenity's case it was 11 months of negligence that led to her death. Will the Premier commit that Human Services' executives, managers, and caseworkers will appear before the committee to explain how things went so tragically wrong?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the important question. I share the devastation that all Albertans are feeling on this issue. Once we have the committee, we will make sure that we look into all aspects of intervention and make sure that we put enough safeguards in place so that we can avoid similar incidents happening in the future. It will be a thorough look at the intervention system in the case before us.

Thank you.

Mr. Jean: This issue matters to Albertans, and it used to matter to the NDP, but now when we ask the minister what has improved, we get no actual answers, and we get the indigenous affairs minister ranting about right wingers as if he hasn't been part of the government for over 19 months. If things need to be changed, the minister

needs to change them. That's his job. Will the Premier guarantee that any and all front-line workers or managers in children's services that want to speak to the all-party committee will be given full whistle-blower protection at the committee?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We take this matter incredibly seriously. That's one of the reasons why we've implemented a number of efforts to make sure that not only do we protect the children who are in care, but we provide supports to families to enable them to care for their own children in the safest way possible. We are going to continue to work with members of all parties in this House to make sure that we get this right. This is a matter far more significant than political games or partisan attacks, and that's why we're working with all parties, to make sure we can move forward collaboratively.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: Political games, Mr. Speaker? This was disclosed by a reporter because nobody came clean with the facts.

Prescription Drug Coverage for Rare Diseases

Mr. Jean: In early November I asked the Premier questions related to drug coverage for an Alberta teen, Haley Chisholm, who suffers from a very rare kidney disease. At the time the Premier committed that she would have the minister look into the matter and get back to me with respect to the particulars. It's been over a month, and Haley continues to wait for answers about receiving funding. To the Premier: what is the answer for Haley about this drug, that would improve Haley's quality of life and potentially extend it?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. In terms of this specific case we respect the privacy of individuals, and I will not be discussing specific medical conditions in this House. But I can assure all members that this matter is one that is in the best hands of medical professionals. Doctors and other qualified health professionals should be making questions and determinations about the best mode of treatment, not political individuals. That's why we're making sure that medical professionals have the ability to make the best determinations when it comes to medical conditions.

Mr. Jean: The Premier previously stated: "Our regulations are designed so that health care professionals are making decisions about what is in the best health outcome for people." That's not the case for Haley, who continues to see her quality of life decline. Now, speaking of medical professionals, Haley's doctor has clearly stated that this drug is the best course of treatment for Haley's extreme, rare kidney disease. Will the Premier commit to following the advice of the health professional who knows Haley's case best and fund this drug?

2:00

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, my heart goes out to Haley and her family at this very difficult time, as it does to other Albertans who are hoping to have opportunities to access potential treatments that may be of benefit to them. There is a very special panel that is set up to determine the best medical course when it comes to these types of special applications. I commend the physician for doing what he believes is in the best interest, and I respect the panels, that are full of health professionals, to make the best determination when it comes to moving forward.

Mr. Jean: The current regulations that surround the short-term exceptional drug treatment program have meant nothing but roadblocks for Haley's family. The Chisholms chose to come forward, and I'm very thankful that they did because they shone light on this program and the shortcomings of the program as it currently stands. I sincerely hope that Haley will receive the funding that she needs for this drug. But what about other families like the Chisholms, who have met so many obstacles in the system and continue to meet those obstacles? Will the Premier commit to reviewing the exceptional drug treatment program regulations? Yes or no?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I stand by the fact that medical professionals, not politicians, are in the best position to be able to make determinations about how to move forward. This is a very sensitive case, as are the others that have been referred to in this question. It's important that we give support to our medical professionals when determining the best course of action rather than trying to make political attacks. I know that I'm not in the best position to be able to make a determination, and it's important to make sure that doctors have the ability along with other health professionals to make the best course-of-care decisions. I feel for Haley and for all others who are in this position, and I trust our physician community to make the best determinations.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Electricity Costs

Mr. Jean: Seven billion dollars: is that the final price tag for incompetent NDP policies on our electricity grid? Let's see. The cost to kill coal jobs, \$1.4 billion; subsidies for new power, up to \$8 billion; raising taxes and forcing losses in the Balancing Pool, add another billion dollars. What does this mean for the average Alberta household? Well, higher power bills and higher taxes to pay for subsidies and a stunning amount of government borrowing. Will the Premier confirm how many billions of dollars taxpayers will be on the hook for, or has she simply not done her homework?

Ms Hoffman: What I will confirm is that the Official Opposition is lobbying for a 900 per cent increase, potentially, to power bills for Alberta consumers. [interjections] That certainly is not in the best interests of Albertans, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I'm incredibly proud of the work that our department and our lead minister have done on making sure that we can have stable, predictable, reliable, and as affordable as possible electricity for Albertans. [interjections] I won't back down from standing up for ordinary Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I just want to remind you that this is the season of festive celebrations and that we want to be kind to each other. So please remember that. Think of that Christmas tree.

The hon. member.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And it's also a place where the NDP make the rules and make the laws that add these taxes to Albertans. First, the NDP raised taxes. Those tax increases caused massive losses for power companies. These companies used the law and gave their contracts back to the Balancing Pool. The Balancing Pool is now losing hundreds of millions of dollars directly because of an incredible level of incompetence from this government. Now the government wants to give themselves a blank cheque to cover their losses. That's at least \$500 million today and will lead to higher power costs for Albertans for the next decade. Will the Premier admit, finally, that she's made a mistake . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The member may not be aware, but there is a plan to move a phase-out of coal across Canada. Instead of standing by and saying, "Ottawa, you solve our problems for us," we have a government that isn't afraid to tackle difficult issues. We're moving forward with leadership, and – guess what? – being good leaders is not only good for us at home, but it's good for us in terms of getting our products to tidewater. Last week there were two pipelines approved, and it's been made very clear that that wouldn't have happened if weren't for the climate leadership of this government.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, unemployment is at 9 per cent; 74,000 full-time jobs vanished in the past year under this government and their policies. But the NDP continues a lawsuit against Enmax that could lead to 4 per cent property tax increases to Calgarians. They are asking taxpayers to fork over \$7 billion for changes and experiments, NDP experiments, in our electricity grid. To top it off, the carbon tax comes into effect in just 26 days. How can the NDP justify asking Albertans at this time to pay \$2,500 a year to help fund the NDP's multibillion-dollar boondoggle?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member's questions are all over the place today, and I'll tell you where he was on Saturday. He was leading a rally that called for the personal and private information of Albertans to be hacked into – that's not leadership – and also for our Premier, who's working today to address very valid concerns with regard to our access to tidewater, to be locked up. That's shameful, and I really wish the Leader of the Official Opposition would do more justice to Albertans in standing up for Albertans.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Child Protective Services Review

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This House did valuable work on November 21 when it held an emergency debate to discuss the deaths of children in care. The appalling death of four-year-old Serenity brings all members together to encourage a lasting solution to these tragedies. I would thank the government for accepting my recommendation to establish the all-member committee. To the Human Services minister: will you make sure that the committee's terms of reference have a broad scope of authority so it's able to root out systemic problems with the child intervention system?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. I would begin by thanking the member for bringing up that suggestion. That's certainly a very heartbreaking issue, and all Albertans share that devastation. I'm deeply concerned about this issue. I will make sure that when we set up the committee, it looks into all aspects surrounding this case so that we can have enough safeguards in place that we can avoid similar incidents happening in the future. We are absolutely committed to making sure that children get the support . . .

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the yes.

The relentless work of the Child and Youth Advocate in investigating deaths of children in care has prompted, amongst other things, the formation of this committee. I'd like to take the opportunity to thank Mr. Graff and his staff for the valuable work, which, undoubtedly, takes a personal toll. The involvement of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate will be critical in the committee's review of the child intervention system. To the minister: will the committee have the ability to invite expert witnesses, including Mr. Graff, to get the best information possible to make the best decisions for children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Again I can assure the House and all Albertans that this issue is the most concerning one. It's a priority for our government and it's a priority for me that we get this right, so I will make sure that we have the committee set up in a way that can work and that can identify opportunities that we can provide to our children going forward and make sure that similar incidents don't happen.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like two yeses, so we'll continue.

The Standing Committee on Legislative Offices is in the midst now of reviewing the Child and Youth Advocate Act, with oral presentations beginning in mid-January. As the standing committee is looking at updating the four-year-old act, its review offers a window of opportunity for the minister's committee in case it has changes to recommend to that act. In the spirit of timeliness, Minister, do you foresee this committee meeting in the next month so that its work can coincide with the standing committee's review of the Child and Youth Advocate Act and add to it if possible?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. The standing committee is an all-party committee, and they set their own schedule, but I will make sure that whatever work the committee I establish does, it doesn't replicate the work of other committees and other initiatives across the GOA so that instead of replicating, we are learning from past reviews what's available and making sure that we get that done in a timely manner so that we have changes that we can implement as soon as possible.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View

Addiction and Mental Health Strategy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In June of 2015, shortly after taking office, the Premier announced a review of mental health and addictions here in Alberta. She recognized that the current system was not good enough and announced that her government would act on the matter. The committee reported the Valuing Mental Health report one year ago. Hundreds of front-line workers and families who participated and continue to participate and offer input are still waiting for an update on the 26 remaining recommendations to fix our inconsistent and fragmented mental health and addictions system. To the associate minister: what progress has been made beyond the six initiatives?

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon member.
The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would thank the member not just for his question but for his tireless advocacy on this issue as well as his service on the review committee. Our government recognizes that mental health and addiction treatment are a priority not just for Health but across ministries and within the community as well. We've been working very closely with community leaders and service agencies on the implementation of the report, and we'll have more to report in the coming weeks.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's been almost 12 months. I think we're expecting more timely reporting.

Given that the panel itself identified primary care and primary care network reform as essential for these health providers in order for them to play a stronger role in addiction and mental health, what reforms have occurred in primary care?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his question. The role of the primary care networks and primary health more broadly within our health system is a very critical one, and we've been working very closely with the PCN leads not just around how we're incorporating mental health services but also how we can include interdisciplinary teams throughout the system and throughout our province so that Albertans know that they are getting the best quality care that they can and so that we're able to make the best use of the resources available.

Dr. Swann: Again, Mr. Speaker, we're looking for progress. Can the minister provide evidence of progress? Given that the opioid crisis continues unabated, now over one death per day in Alberta, and a wide range of professionals need to know how this crisis is changing, when will we see public reporting monthly to assess ER wait times, ER visits, wait times for treatments, naloxone use, and deaths so we can assess whether things are getting worse or better?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. This is data that our department is tracking through the chief medical officer of health. I'm pleased to update the House that as of October 31 over 7,200 naloxone kits have been distributed to Albertans through nearly 900 registered sites, which include local pharmacies and university campuses. We know that because of this we are seeing a decline so far in the number of overdoses but also that patients are able to access life-saving medical interventions because that naloxone dose is able to reverse . . .

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

Public Transit in Calgary and Area

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's widely known that investment in transit helps to create jobs, protects the environment, and gives additional options in mobility to the public. I know that many Albertans and residents in Calgary-Northern Hills currently struggle to find efficient public transit options in their communities, whether smaller towns or north-central Calgary. Can the Minister of Transportation tell us what investments the government is making in public transit?

Mr. Mason: Thank you for that question, hon. member. I'm very pleased to say that this weekend I announced nearly \$250 million in provincial support for public transit in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, from Medicine Hat to Fort McMurray. Thanks to the partnership and collaboration of all orders of government the announcement included more than \$500 million total for transit projects in our province. Transit is increasingly becoming the way that people can get to work, can get to appointments, can visit their family in an affordable and environmentally responsible way. We're glad to support it.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Kleinstaubert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that enhanced public transit can help municipalities with land-use planning by easing pressure to continually expand road networks and parking lots, which is especially important to growing urban areas, to the same minister: how is the government investing in transit in Calgary to support efficient transit-oriented urban planning?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the provincial funding for transit announced this past weekend includes more than \$147 million for the city of Calgary. I'm very proud of that. These public transportation investments will stimulate economic growth, transit-oriented development, and an environment for innovation like electric vehicle technology. Our government is committed to major infrastructure spending to meet the needs of all Albertans and Calgarians as well, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Kleinstaubert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Calgary region has long been an economic centre in western Canada and given that Airdrie is a rapidly growing part of that future, again to the same minister: how is the government investing in transit in that community?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question, Mr. Speaker. This member is on the ball. On Saturday we announced that Airdrie will see new transit investment of more than \$9 million, and more than \$6 million of that will be from our government. This will support design work for construction of a north transit terminal, which is expected to include an off-street platform for customers, parking for up to 200 vehicles, and amenities such as heated shelters and on-site security cameras. We'll also support a new mobile fare payment system and an integrated transit system alert. Airdrie is on our map.

The Speaker: Thank you. Such enthusiasm.

Provincial Borrowing

Mr. Fildebrandt: In June 2015 the government repealed Alberta's already weak debt control legislation with a cap of 10 per cent on GDP, allowing the government to once again borrow for operations. Just months later they repealed their very own legislation, leaving no limit whatsoever on their ability to borrow. Now the government intends to borrow money to fund their incompetent management of the electricity Balancing Pool. We are literally borrowing to keep the lights on. Will the minister tell us how much additional debt the government will accrue for their electricity debacle?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With regard to borrowing, I want to say that the amount of debt that we're going to be taking on I think I tabled with the fiscal plan. It's about 10 per cent debt to GDP by the end of this fiscal plan – that's where we'll be – which is the lowest of any province in this country. The second lowest is Saskatchewan. They're behind us. We are the lowest, and that's what we'll be keeping with, the fiscal plan that we tabled.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Not answering the question, as usual.

Given, Mr. Speaker, that the original \$30-a-tonne carbon tax was going to cost taxpayers \$3 billion, with the funds going to the green slush fund, the government is now increasing the tax to \$50 a tonne, costing taxpayers \$5 billion. Last week we asked the minister if he had a plan to balance the budget before his 95th birthday. His only response was to accuse the opposition of wanting to throw children out onto the street, and still he didn't answer the question as to how we'd balance the budget. So I'll ask a simple question: does the government intend to put any of the carbon tax revenue against the deficit?

Mr. Ceci: We've been extremely clear with that. We are not using any of those monies. You know, the monies that the carbon levy will bring in are going to be going back into the pockets of Albertans through a rebate, they're going back to Albertans with innovation across this province, and they're going back to companies, who will become more efficient. Agencies, nonprofits, everybody will use that money. It's not going to the deficit.

Mr. Fildebrandt: They're going to use the money to stuff the pockets of corporate slush funds, Mr. Speaker.

Given, Mr. Speaker, that the government is borrowing \$14 billion a year right now with no plan to stop, the revenue from the expanding carbon tax must look awfully appetizing to the minister right about now. This is concerning because the government has said that its \$3 billion carbon tax was never a ceiling. Albertans want to know: is the new \$5 billion carbon tax a hard ceiling, a soft ceiling, or a trampoline?

Mr. Ceci: I just want to reiterate for everyone that the carbon levy monies will not be going against the deficit. It will not go to pay off the debt. It is going to diversify this economy, something that that side is not focused on. They're focused on boom and bust. They're focused on backward-looking policies. They're not focused on the future like we are. They're focused on everything that Albertans don't want.

2:20

Electricity Costs (continued)

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, as Albertans are merrily turning on Christmas lights for their last carbon tax free holiday season, many are wondering just how much more power will cost once they finish singing *Auld Lang Syne*. The government has unleashed a veritable blizzard of power-related announcements in recent days, and Albertans are wondering just what size of shovel they will need to dig out from the avalanche of increased NDP costs. To the Energy minister: including loans to the Balancing Pool and subsidies to renewable energy generators, what is your best estimate of the additional cost of implementing all facets of the NDP power plan?

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, there is no carbon levy on electricity. What there is, however, is a series of rebates to lower and middle-income folks for their use of

transportation fuels and heating fuels and a variety of programs that Albertans can avail themselves of – some \$650 million worth of efficiency programs – that will apply to reducing transportation fuel use, heating fuel in homes, and electricity use. In addition, the renewables contracts will be dealt with through a competitive procurement process.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that there are many contributors to the overall price tag and given that this complicates the exact amount that Alberta taxpayers will end up shelling out, to the Energy minister. Let's just look at one phase of the cost. Given that considerable subsidies will be required to bring the increase to the 30 per cent target for renewable energy set by this government, what is the government's best estimate of the total cost of subsidies for renewables between now and 2030?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are undertaking a competitive auction process as recommended by the Alberta Electric System Operator. We are in the middle of that process right now. What we do know is that renewables are now competitive with natural gas. However, they do have different economics to them. With natural gas coming on, we'll be looking at the capacity market, as the minister explained to the public a couple of weeks ago, and for the renewables we will do a contract-for-differences model because we know that this is the lowest cost procurement for both types of power.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, Albertans would like to know what the cost is. Given that this NDP government is trying to encourage new renewable energy production, which we support, and given that Alberta already has over 10 per cent of its existing generation from renewable sources, including wind and solar, and given that the government has yet to indicate to existing generators of renewable energy as to whether existing infrastructure will be eligible for subsidies, to the Energy minister: can you clarify? Will companies who already have existing renewable generation infrastructure be eligible for subsidies on both existing as well as newly constructed renewable infrastructure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As for overall costs, whether it's the rebates, the investments in efficiency infrastructure, renewables, or technology, those were contained within the budget that we passed earlier this year. As for existing renewables, that is part of the conversation with the capacity market and part of the consultations that the minister announced for the 30 per cent goal. That competitive procurement process and that contract-for-differences model apply to new generation.

Thank you.

Municipal Tax Maximum Ratio

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, the Legislature has been debating Bill 21 and last week passed it at Committee of the Whole. Currently Bill 21 is clear. Certain municipalities that exceed the new 5 to 1 tax ratio can continue to exceed that ratio until such time as the municipality may decide to lower it. But then last week a new government discussion guide indicated that all municipalities may now be expected to conform to the new 5 to 1 ratio at some unspecified time. To the minister: if this change was under consideration, why was it not included in the government's amendment to Bill 21?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm incredibly proud of the fact that the discussion around Bill 21 has been incredibly open and transparent, and we will continue that. The fact that concerns came up during the consultation that perhaps we needed to have a conversation around gradually bringing the outliers into compliance: that conversation needed to happen with all the people affected by that. Rather than putting something into the legislation based on that conversation, without talking to everyone, we put it in the discussion guide so we can continue to have conversations about what the best interest of Alberta is going forward.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, given that the uncertainty the government has now created by reconsidering the grandfathering clause around the 5 to 1 ratio is creating concern in those communities that are exceeding it and given that the residents of Fort McMurray that have suffered unprecedented devastation from this summer's wildfire are now being faced with the prospect that their property taxes will make their living situation completely untenable, to the minister: what are you doing to ensure that the residents of Fort McMurray and the other nonconforming municipalities do not receive a devastating property tax increase in the near future as a result of this uncertainty?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, the importance of consultation on this issue cannot be overemphasized. We will work with the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo to help them achieve the ratio in a way that is reasonable and responsible. Currently there is no timeframe in the legislation as to when municipalities would have to comply. We're looking forward to hearing the feedback from Wood Buffalo residents and all Albertans on the tax ratio ratio. I promised the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo that I would stand with them after the fire, and I have not stepped back from them. I was with them then, I'm with them now, and I will be in the future.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, despite what we just heard, given that the 19 municipalities and their residents that currently exceed the 5 to 1 ratio thought they had a commitment from the government that would see their property taxes remain affordable over the long term and given that now these same communities are discovering that all is not what it appears and that the government is considering imposing the 5 to 1 ratio on municipalities even before it's completely passed Bill 21, to the minister: is this a fair way to treat our municipal partners, or is it just current government practice?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the idea that somehow this was a big surprise: this came up, there were many questions across many of the sessions across the province, and it was my responsibility to take that feedback, that came from multiple sources, and to engage with the people of Alberta on this issue. We will work with all of those communities. We look forward to hearing the feedback from those municipalities and all Albertans on the linked tax ratio from our discussion guide that we released last month.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the work I do in engaging with municipalities, and I look forward to the conversations we'll have to come forward with a reasonable, responsible way to move forward for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Health Care in Central Alberta

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Sylvan Lake urgent care centre issue, which is a community priority and a common-sense, cost-saving measure, is still waiting for a public commitment from the Minister of Health. The government has had the final proposal on urgent care for Sylvan Lake since September 30. We've been made aware of some voice mode indications that the government may be moving forward on this, but my constituents would like a firm answer. To the Minister of Health. The good folks of Sylvan Lake are waiting for an answer on urgent care. Can the minister confirm for us today that she has approved their proposal?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the fact that I'm speaking with the community, and we continue to work in partnership. After some productive meetings over the summer we were pleased to see Alberta Health Services participate in a local joint task force with community leaders and health care providers on: what are the needs for the Sylvan Lake area? We received that feedback at the end of September. We've asked AHS to look into how they can best deliver after-hours care and the community's needs to be addressed as we move forward in partnership. I look forward to continuing to have ongoing dialogue with the community as we roll out next steps.

Mr. MacIntyre: Well, Minister, summer is coming, and Sylvan Lakers and the tourists that enjoy it as their summertime destination would like some answers.

Given that the cost of urgent care in Sylvan Lake is significantly lower than what this government spends in their advertising of rotten policies and given that this urgent care centre is a common-sense, cost-saving measure supported by the community, including partial financial support, will we see this urgent care facility financed and rolled out in the next budget?

Ms Hoffman: Today summer feels pretty far away, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that it was pretty chilly this morning when I warmed up my car, but I'm glad to hear the optimism from the other side of the House.

I'm glad that the opposition has raised this question in the past. It's given us an opportunity to reflect on some of the back and forth that they keep talking about today. It's about spending money. I am really committed to making sure we find a way to best serve the needs of the local community whereas the Official Opposition continues to push for privatization, outsourcing, and cutting services as well as laying off nurses, Mr. Speaker. That's not the government we have today, and I'm proud of that.

Mr. MacIntyre: Given the speed with which this government moves, we need to start now for something in the summer.

While my constituents are being asked to go without this desperately needed urgent care centre, they're also observing a general neglect of health services in central Alberta. Given that Red Deer cardiac catheterization has been overlooked, the Didsbury hospital is facing service reductions, and response times for ambulances across central Alberta are abysmal, Minister, Albertans are tired of the rhetoric. They want committed timelines. When will central Alberta finally be prioritized by this government as the right place for the right care at the right time?

2:30

Ms Hoffman: Well, I have to say that I agree with one thing that the member opposite just said. I'm tired of the rhetoric from that member and that caucus when it comes to our priorities, Mr. Speaker. We have worked diligently with the communities, communities across Alberta, to make sure that we have the right rollout. We are happy to sit down. I've toured many of these communities and met with local leaders first-hand, and they themselves are very pleased that we're sitting down and focused on solving problems whereas the members opposite keep throwing mud. We'll get results.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Carbon Levy and Agricultural Costs

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've talked to chicken producers, and they're telling me that natural gas is one of their biggest costs. Now, because of the carbon tax starting in January, when the tax is fully implemented, the costs for natural gas to heat their barns in the winter will almost double. To the minister: does this government expect Albertans to pay more for chicken, turkey, and eggs, or do they just expect producers to have to eat this huge loss?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I personally have listened to the farming community – farmers, ranchers, producers, processors – right across the province. We have taken a stand, taken a leadership role on varied aspects; for instance, being able to exclude marked fuel from the carbon levy as well as having a climate leadership plan for producers specifically on intensive livestock operations, greenhouses, and other farming operations right across the province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that natural gas is a huge part of the expense of producing fertilizer and given that the carbon tax is going to almost double the costs of natural gas and given that the price of fertilizer is going to take a huge jump and given that grain producers don't get to set the price at which they sell their product – they're just price takers – to the minister: does this government just expect grain producers to eat this huge loss?

The Speaker: The minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we are in active engagement with many of our energy-intensive, trade-exposed industries right now, working out a set of output-based allocations that work for all industries, including the fertilizer sector. I had the pleasure of meeting with them last week. We are examining ways that we can both set levels that encourage the best performance and the best-in-class across the continent to ensure that we don't open up our trade-exposed industries to competition from areas where we don't see carbon pricing such as the United States and, finally, ensure that we've got . . .

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

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also, given that the price of natural gas is going to jump and given that beef producers have to heat huge shops to keep their feeding equipment in and given that

this will create a loss for beef producers as well, to the minister: has this government really done a thorough analysis of how this carbon tax is going to affect our second-largest industry in Alberta, agriculture?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and for the member's question. It's important to note that we have had the opportunity to listen and talk to producers from right across the province. That's why we've had the opportunity to hear them and implement different programs that are going to help them with the carbon levy. Farmers know that climate change is real, and they're willing – not only willing – able to do their part, and do so. We're proud that this government has taken plans, taken programs that will prioritize agriculture as we go forward in this climate future.

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

Service Dogs

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Service dogs are vital supports for people with disabilities, and today there are only approximately 80 to 100 active, licensed service dogs in Alberta. Given that service dogs enable people with disabilities to live in their communities and successfully navigate the challenges of daily life, to the Minister of Human Services: what is the government doing to increase access to much-needed and life-saving service dogs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government has heard from veterans advocates and members of the disability community across the province who have called for more service dogs to be available. The service dogs qualifications regulation expires March 31, '17, and prior to this expiration we are exploring potential changes to the regulation to increase Albertans' access to qualified service dogs. We are committed to upholding the safety of persons requiring service dogs while ensuring they receive the supports they need.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's service dog legislation is very restrictive in terms of approved accrediting and testing bodies for service dogs and handlers compared to other jurisdictions, to the same minister: what is the government doing to expand Alberta's service dog community and expand the scope of accreditation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member. Given the important role service dogs play in the lives of those they serve, we want to work with people who use service dogs and who are involved in training to make sure that we have high standards while increasing the number of service dog teams. Service dogs that successfully complete a training program by an institution accredited by ADI have qualifications under the current legislation. As we review these regulations, we will be exploring ways to expand access to service dogs through the testing and accreditation system, and I look forward to sharing more details.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that Alberta is home to many skilled and educated people who use service dogs in order to navigate life, to the same minister: what is the government doing to create inclusive environments for people with disabilities who choose and are able to use service dogs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member. I want to assure the member and all Albertans that we will take a thoughtful, thorough approach as we explore potential changes to the legislation, and qualified service dogs will continue to meet high standards to protect the health and safety of the public. Under the existing legislation a number of qualified service dogs can apply for a government identification card that can be shown when their right of access is denied or questioned. As we explore changes to the regulations, we will make sure that we work to improve the public . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Deaths of Children in Care

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In April of this year the NDP unveiled their business plan for Human Services. This included an overview and the key strategies by which this minister intends to govern. In their overview they blame the low price of oil and the economic downturn for most major problems. Shockingly, their key strategies failed to even mention the crisis situation with children dying in our foster care system. Given the seriousness of the situation, why is safety of children in care not explicitly listed as a priority while children continue to die in the province's care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Children dying in our care is certainly the most concerning issue facing my ministry and facing our province, and that was the reason that even despite the falling oil prices, we increased the funding for Human Services – and we increased by \$37 million – so that we are able to support the children in our care. That wouldn't happen under their plan.

Mrs. Pitt: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

Mr. Nixon: Given that the tragic death of Serenity has served as a major wake-up call for all of us in this Assembly and for all Albertans and given that there are many more tragic stories just like this, with incidents of children enduring physical and sexual abuse while in care and, in the most drastic cases, sometimes death in care, and since the Minister of Human Services was asked last week, he should have an answer today: what specific actions has the minister taken to protect children in care since the Child and Youth Advocate and the Auditor General released their reports?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's a deeply concerning issue. We have taken action. We have added \$37 million to child intervention so that we are able to support our intervention staff, and we have developed a new kinship assessment tool after the death of the child in question so that we are able to support our kinship care providers. We are absolutely committed to making

sure that our children have the right supports and they have resources to thrive in our province.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Nixon: Given that we have heard no details on the NDP government's plan to prevent the tragedy that happened to Serenity from happening again and given that there have already been many reports and round-tables on this very topic with clear direction about what needs to change and since the minister has said that he's accepting the recommendations from the Child and Youth Advocate and the Auditor General, why haven't these changes been implemented, and how much longer do Alberta's children have to wait for this minister to take action?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. As I said, it's an important issue, and we are taking action. That's why we have increased funding for the child intervention system. But I want the member and everyone to know that the causes of these issues are complex. They relate to poverty, they relate to addiction, they relate to the devastating impact of residential schools, and that's why the Minister of Indigenous Relations is working with indigenous communities so we can be there for our indigenous communities and we can get this right.

Thank you.

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

Renewable Energy Strategy

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is aggressively phasing out coal in favour of as yet undetermined taxpayer subsidies on renewables. Renewables, when executed appropriately, provide a positive green addition to the energy grid. However, outside of hydro, renewables do not provide a reliable round-the-clock baseload. Coal conversions to natural gas are a good way to add relatively efficient baseload, but these plants may not be as environmentally friendly as new builds. To the Minister of Energy: what is your government doing to incent new natural gas plant investment to ensure long-term grid stability?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. The hon. member cites one of the reasons that we announced last week a capacity market. We need to ensure that Alberta's electricity market will provide our power needs in the future. We made this decision to move to a capacity market based on advice that we received from the ISO. In fact, more than three years ago the ISO was looking into this, and they advised us that the capacity market was the best way to balance a stable grid with renewable electricity.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that the aforementioned coal to natural gas transition requires a significant amount of capital investment and given that the only capital committed thus far is government – or should I say “taxpayer” – money and given that investor confidence in Alberta is at an all-time low following the government's repeated disregard for signed contracts and threats of retroactive legislation, again to the minister: why would anyone invest significant capital in Alberta when your government has repeatedly demonstrated contempt for those very same investors?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, in addition to the ISO being consulted, we consulted with industry, electricity companies. We did research across North America and discovered that Alberta was an outlier and, in fact, the only other jurisdiction is Texas that had an energy-only market. So we made the decision to move into the capacity market, and investors told us immediately upon announcement that they were prepared to invest in Alberta.

Mr. Gotfried: Trust is paramount, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government is heavily subsidizing new renewables with taxpayer dollars and given that despite this government's statements to the contrary there are already significant renewable assets in Alberta and given that this government is doing absolutely nothing for the sustainability of these existing renewables, making them uncompetitive and unviable compared to new renewables, again to the minister. It seems your government is trying to take credit for all renewables by excluding pioneering investors. Why aren't you supporting these producers in continued viability of existing renewable assets?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To be clear, our electricity grid has not seen a major final investment decision since 2009. Jurisdictions around the world are moving to a capacity market, and so are we. That is why the ISO's independent operators said in this report that Alberta's wholesale market is not attractive to investors. Dawn Farrell, CEO of TransAlta, said that this decision was necessary. She went on to say that the fact that we have this capacity market enables us to convert some of our coal plants to gas, keeping our markets working, keeping those communities strong.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Energy Industry Diversification

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Today I was pleased to be at the announcement when the government announced two projects that will benefit from the petrochemicals diversification program. Good news for Alberta. One of these projects, the Inter Pipeline project, will receive up to \$200 million in royalty credits to build a \$1.85 billion facility and will directly benefit my constituents in Sherwood Park and those in Alberta's Industrial Heartland by creating full-time jobs during the construction phase and for operations once the project is online. To the minister . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Our government has been clear that the \$500 million to the two projects will not be expended until the projects are built. The incentives were enough to create these projects and have the companies consider Alberta as opposed to the Gulf coast. We need to take our diversification plans seriously now because we need jobs in Alberta. During peak construction there will be 4,000 jobs and 1,400 direct and indirect jobs once they are running.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the program received 16 applications from investors locally and globally but was only able to approve two, to the same minister: what will happen to the 14 applications that government did not accept?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. These applications show that companies here and across the globe want to invest in Alberta. There were many good proposals, and between my ministry and the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade we'll be working with those companies and seeing if there are other options that they can avail themselves of. They will also have the opportunity to speak to the economic diversification advisory committee.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the current economic challenges that my constituents and all Albertans are facing, what other steps is this government taking to diversify Alberta's energy industry?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the questions. This is the first announcement today of energy diversification in Alberta. We created the energy diversification advisory committee to work with Albertans on how to do just that, and there will be opportunities for industry, investors, and everyday Albertans to engage with this committee. The committee is based on a group of business, labour, and First Nations leaders, and on October 18 Deborah Yedlin from the *Calgary Herald* said that this committee has the experience to get the job done.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I know that some of you may want to get out and wrap presents for each other, so in 30 seconds we will move to Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

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

Human Rights Day

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. International Human Rights Day, celebrated on December 10 of every year, commemorates the day in 1948 when the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the universal declaration of human rights.

It's one thing to talk about human rights, and it's another to work diligently towards making sure that these rights are observed. Far too often the social rights enshrined in the declaration are ignored, but this government, of which I'm proud to be a part, is ensuring that we put these fundamental rights front and centre in our work as we move Alberta forward. A fine example is the building of a permanent dialysis unit in Lac La Biche, and we're working with communities to do the same.

Additionally, our government is investing \$1.2 billion in affordable housing capital projects over the next five years, like the Parkdale project here in Edmonton, that will provide affordable homes for 70 families.

This government is protecting the right of everyone to work and the right to education by providing funding for enrolment, hiring a thousand teachers, 250 support staff, and making schools the number one employer in many small towns during this current economic downturn. Because education doesn't end when you become an adult, we've frozen tuition fees as well.

These may seem like talking points, Mr. Speaker, but each one of these examples describes the changing reality of Albertans, the

people we are here to serve, due to this government's action. As legislators we share an enormous responsibility to ensure that every Albertan is treated with respect and dignity. Ultimately, we must accept our true duty as members of the Legislature, to clear away systemic barriers that keep Albertans from living up to their full potential, so that everyone who calls Alberta home may have access to the same opportunities. Mr. Speaker, I'll be the first one to state that we are far from being done, but we have made considerable progress.

Thank you.

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

2:50

Charity at Christmas

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Christmas is fast approaching, the time when we remember the birth of Jesus, born in Bethlehem to a young couple who did not have a place to stay when they were forced to register for a census, by the way, so they could be taxed.

On the weekend I, a left-footed Baptist not known for his ability to dance, participated in Shakin 'n Drayton, a twist on *Dancing with the Stars*, to help raise funds for Humans Helping Humans. Humans Helping Humans is a typical response by the people of Drayton Valley. This amazing group raises money and builds houses for those who would not likely have a chance at home ownership. On the weekend eight dance couples and hundreds of citizens and volunteers raised approximately \$65,000 for Humans Helping Humans. This is from a community where businesses have been shutting down, hotels have been empty, people have been laid off or are working only part-time.

About a month ago I attended the CT4DV gala, sponsored by the Drayton Valley health foundation. This group has worked hard for a CT scanner over the past four or five years, and in that time they have raised over \$1 million for a scanner and renovations to the hospital.

The people in my constituency have never let the roadblocks of life stop them from supporting their community and taking care of those that are less fortunate. Across the constituency, whether it was the chili fundraiser for the John Maland high school band program or the opening of the Devon Christian school playground, the people in the Drayton Valley-Devon constituency dig deep into their pockets to help their neighbours.

A wise pastor of mine once said: in this life we only take turns; sometimes you help me in my distress, and at other times I help you. So during this Christmas let me encourage all of us to look outside of ourselves and see how we can help the people in our community. You never know the impact of your generosity, just as a certain innkeeper had no idea how a young homeless couple ready to give birth would change the world.

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

Social Work

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The beauty of our political system is that we draw people from all spectrums of our society not only in terms of political ideology but in work and life experience, and having the chance to have these people influence decisions that our government can effect in these specific fields is a rare opportunity indeed.

If I might give an example, I experienced a career spanning two decades in emergency services. When the government's report on the Fort McMurray fire is released, I guarantee you that I will be drawing on every resource that I have to evaluate that report and

make recommendations that will ensure that this will never happen again.

Our society is dealing with increased hard-drug use, so much so that we're going to allow safe needle injection sites. We have a high percentage of indigenous women who live in poverty and are involved in the sex trade. There are mothers and children involved in abusive relationships. We have a high proportion of seniors living in poverty. There are people with developmental disabilities and substance abuse issues who are living in the streets. And we had a child die after a year of neglect and abuse.

In our society there is one career that is the toughest job of them all. These folks are tasked with helping the people in these brutal conditions. They are tasked with taking care of our most vulnerable. They are social workers. A social workers has to deal with people in their lowest, saddest of times, and the fix is never a quick fix. It's a long and arduous process that sometimes never resolves. I have no doubt that the negative exposure of this job weighs very heavily on those that take on this profession.

I have high hopes that our people, my brothers and sisters across the way in this Legislature, will consider using their vast cumulative experience in social work to at least investigate the possibilities as to how we can do better, how we can unshackle those that are tasked with this very tough job. I have no doubt that we will hear about impediments like confidentiality, privacy, personal freedoms, professional code, underfunded, overworked, laws, and courts, but, Mr. Speaker, we have to try.

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

Human Rights

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The universal declaration of human rights is about that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Everyone has a right to life, liberty, and security. Unfortunately, with all our advanced education and awareness there are still some in this world who do not believe in these fundamental values. Horrific human rights violations continue around the world across the spectrum of race, colour, sexual preference, religion, gender, and political views.

In Alberta our understanding of basic rights might be different than the horrors such as the 1984 genocide of New Delhi Sikhs, the Rwandan genocide of 1990, the Bosnian genocide of 1995, and Darfur in 2003. We should all look up to leaders like Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., the Dalai Lama, Calipah Mirza Masroor Ahmad, and Sardar Jaswant Singh Khalra, who fought for human rights. We can all learn from their teachings.

The citizens of our province were recently enlightened and outraged by the personal stories of residential school survivors, who survived our own nation's attempt at cultural genocide. We still don't live in a perfect world because shocking racial incidents continue to occur in Alberta daily. I am proud to note, however, that more and more citizens feel empowered to confront it when it arises. For example, when racial slurs were hurled at an African-American who was simply walking down an Edmonton street, a movement sprung up in Alberta called Make It Awkward. This campaign formed the basis of a community backlash when antiturban posters were slapped up at a local campus. In a smart twist to Make it Awkward citizens were invited to rock a turban. The wildly popular event turned racism on its head.

Because Albertans are doing their part to combat discrimination, misogyny, and bullying, it is especially incumbent on us as legislators to play a public role for these efforts. That is the commitment we can all make . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on Standing Order 7(7) to ask for unanimous consent of the House to extend the daily Routine past 3 p.m.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Hon. members, you will note that there are many, many words that need to be heard in this House, and it is with some trepidation that I interrupt the thoughts that are being shared. Again, I remind you to stay within the two-minute time limit.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Pipeline Approval

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week was a good week for Albertans. You wouldn't know it, though, listening to the opposition. Last week two pipelines got approved. That announcement represents thousands of good-paying, family-supporting jobs for Albertans, or at least that's what it represents to most of us. To the opposition two pipelines meant failure.

In the announcement of the decision the Prime Minister said that the pipeline approvals were due to our Premier's leadership. The next day the Leader of the Opposition picks up the phone to a columnist to say that – and I quote – she didn't do any of the hard work. The federal cabinet even stated, clear as day, that were it not for the climate leadership plan, they could not have approved the pipelines. Right on cue the Leader of the Opposition heads to a rally to dismantle that very climate leadership plan. Then at the rally to scrap the plan that got us the two pipeline approvals, people start chanting: lock her up. What is the response from the Leader of the Opposition? Crickets. Sometimes silence can be deafening, and sometimes it's defining.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that conservatives like the Alberta Prosperity Fund believe pipeline approvals under an NDP government are a doomsday scenario, but it's anyone's guess why the opposition can't put Albertans' needs ahead of their own desire for power.

Today with the Premier in B.C. fighting for pipelines, I know that I'm standing on the right side of this House: the side that gets things done, the side that works with others, and the side that's moving Alberta forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Poppy Cultivation and Processing

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Little Bow active pharmaceutical ingredients labs incorporated is a southern Alberta company which has spent nine years pursuing a commercial poppy cultivation and processing industry. Poppy possesses molecules that provide an important pharmaceutical value in the management of pain and treatment of addiction.

Earlier this year the federal government specifically banned the cultivation of culinary varieties of poppies in Canada despite providing over \$1 million in support to poppy research. Recently API Labs asked the Canadian government to permit this cultivation, with no success. API offers a new crop to diversify and strengthen our economy and ultimately create an export success that could mimic Canada's success in canola. If API Labs Inc. were to receive approval by 2023, it's seed sales would be 14,000 tonnes, a value of \$25.1 million. It would mean the creation of many new jobs and more diverse opportunities for local farmers.

3:00

API is on the cusp of making a critical decision on the construction of a multimillion-dollar processing plant. A federal ministerial exemption would allow this investment to proceed. However, regulatory delays put this investment at risk, and the viability of the company is in jeopardy. It is unclear why the government of Canada prohibits this industry when the other G7 countries, including the United Kingdom and Australia, commercially cultivate poppies on an annual basis.

I hope every member of the House can picture what three simple initials, API, can come to represent to Albertans. The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that this company is close to bringing significant value-added economic benefits to Alberta. I hope that this provincial government will support companies like API and continue to advocate on their behalf to the federal government. This government needs to work hard during this downturn to stand up for Alberta businesses.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table five copies of a petition sponsored by Friends of Medicare and CUPE Alberta. No Paid Plasma is a province-wide campaign calling for prohibiting the operating and/or opening of any private paid blood and/or plasma donor clinics.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with the Gaming and Liquor Act I am tabling the appropriate number of copies of the 2015-16 Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission annual report. In addition to ensuring high social responsibility standards, over \$855 million earned from liquor was transferred into the GRF, and \$1.5 billion in gaming revenue went into the lottery fund to support thousands of community initiatives and charities. Lastly, Alberta consumers continue to enjoy unparalleled choice in the liquor market, with nearly 22,000 products now available for sale. That's 22,000 beer, liquor, and wine products.

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a memo from the Chief Medical Examiner to myself in response to questions raised by the Leader of the Official Opposition on December 1, 2016, which I undertook to look into. I have the requisite number of copies.

The Speaker: I think we have two points of order. Is that correct? First of all, the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Point of Order Oral Questions

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be as brief as I can. I'm rising on a point of order under *Beauchesne's* section 408(1)(a), page 120, for those following along at home. In reference to members asking oral questions, 408(1) says:

Such questions should:

- (a) be asked . . . in respect of matters of sufficient urgency and importance as to require an immediate answer.

I couldn't help but notice that the hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills and subsequently, in fact, the Member for Sherwood Park were asking questions that are colloquially known as puffballs. These ones were puffier than most.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, if I look at section 409(5) of *Beauchesne's*:

The matter ought to be of some urgency. There must be some present value in seeking the information during the Question Period rather than through the Order Paper or through correspondence with the Minister or the department.

If you'll indulge me, 410(5):

The primary purpose of the Question Period is seeking information and calling the Government to account.

Those questions were the furthest thing from that. Both questions were the subject of information that was released publicly by the government. In the case of the question from the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills that information was released, pretty much verbatim in the question that he asked, in a beautiful news release on Saturday, and the question from the Member for Sherwood Park was released barely hours ago.

Finally, I'll just end with page 501 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, 2009. There are four guidelines, following principles established by Speaker Bosley in 1986. The first is:

Time [in this House] is scarce and should, therefore, be used as profitably as possible by as many as possible.

And perhaps even more important, the third point:

While there may be other purposes and ambitions involved in Question Period, its primary purpose must be the seeking of information from the government and calling the government to account for its actions.

With that, I would ask that perhaps you would encourage members on the government side to ask questions that legitimately hold their own government to account, Mr. Speaker. I think it would increase the perception of Albertans of the work that we do in this House. In all sincerity, it's very important that there are other means and other ways, especially for government members, to seek that information. One, perhaps, would be writing a letter to the minister, and I have found that that's very effective. Ministers are very good about responding to letters. But there are other ways of getting that information out there rather than valuable time in question period.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that the member opposite pointed out that one of the main purposes of asking questions is to derive information. That is exactly what both members, when they were asking the ministers respectively their questions, were looking at, getting further information. I find it quite shocking that the Member for Calgary-Elbow finds that Infrastructure spending announcements are not very important. You know, it's quite shocking to hear that the member finds that they have no value. I think Albertans would argue oppositely.

But, Mr. Speaker, the reason that I rise is that this is not a point of order. Question period is used to either hold the government to account or, also, to derive information. That's exactly what the two members asking questions were doing, asking further information than what was announced previous to this afternoon. With that, I think there are numerous examples of questions that derive information. The members opposite can call them what they want, but Albertans have a right to know not only what's going on but what's

going on in different ministries. That's the purpose of Oral Question Period.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I too have noticed on occasion in this House that – I think the phrase that the hon. member used was “puffballs.” That has occasionally happened in this House. If one looks up closely, I am sure that you will see some feathers still stuck to the ceiling. I do, however – well, I also noted the minister's enthusiasm with his answer today, which was significant.

But, respectfully, hon. member, I'm not sure that this is a point of order. I would just ask – I know that the government backbenchers will reframe their questions so they have much more substance to them.

The hon. member.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. Thank you. I rise on behalf of the Member for Airdrie to speak to a point of order today. For a point of reference for you, my good Mr. Speaker, I will be referencing 23(h) and (i). During question period the Minister of Human Services made an allegation against this side of the House that we ran on a platform of cutting and that we would have cut the budget for child and family services. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is a wild allegation against this side of the House that clearly created disorder amongst my hon. colleague from Airdrie, who felt so concerned about such an allegation that she rose in her place to call a point of order. That the member had been alleging that we would have in fact cut that budget is categorically untrue.

Now, I know that there has been some dispute of the facts because the only side of the House that's doing any cutting to child and family services is that side, but it still remains the same that this sort of allegation creates disorder and ought to be withdrawn and apologized for.

3:10

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd like to point out to the Opposition House Leader that 23(h) is “[making] allegations against another Member.” The minister did not make any allegations against a member of the House. The minister merely pointed out that in last year's platform the Official Opposition had proposed slashing \$2 billion from the operating budget and a further \$9 billion over the course of five years from capital spending. What the minister was saying was that it would not have happened under their plan due to all the cuts.

I find it fascinating that during Human Services' budget estimates the Member for Airdrie called the importance of investing in front-line services for families a waste of money, so I find it interesting that today this is a point of order. Again, this is not a point of order. This is merely . . .

The Speaker: Thank you. I wish you'd have got to that last statement sooner.

Hon. members, both of you must have read different Blues than I have because you both introduced new information. The Blues that I have: I would not consider it a point of order here; it was a difference of opinion.

I believe we are at Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Legal Aid and Self-represented Litigants

M25. Mr. Cyr moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any studies or briefing notes prepared for the government between January 1, 2012, and February 29, 2016, regarding legal aid or self-represented litigants in Alberta.

[Debated adjourned November 28: Miranda speaking]

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. I'll continue on where Minister Miranda left off. He was speaking on behalf of our colleague the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: We have a point of order? Is that right?

Mr. Rodney: He was just using names.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Opposition House Leader, did you say: point of order?

Mr. Cooper: No, it was not me.

The Speaker: Minister of Finance, please proceed.

Mr. Ceci: I apologize.

I rise to speak on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. I want to start by thanking the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for recognizing the government's investment in legal aid. As the member noted, our government has made significant investments, increasing Legal Aid's budget by 20 per cent since we were formed as a government 19 months ago. That's a commitment to access to justice that the previous, Conservative government simply failed to provide.

Last week the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake also mentioned that he had heard – he didn't cite where he had heard it – that you have to go several times before being accepted by Legal Aid. While some cases may be more complicated than others, it is not typical for an individual to have to apply multiple times to be accepted. In fact, in working with Legal Aid, we've actually reduced some of the inefficiency around applications. Prior to last year, courts were seeing climbing Rowbotham applications, applications where an individual had been rejected by Legal Aid for coverage. This was taking up court resources. By increasing the financial eligibility guidelines and bringing in an appeals process within Legal Aid, we've been able to provide more coverage at the start to take these applications out of the courts. That saves resources for Albertans and allows the courts to focus on serious matters.

That said, as we noted last week, we will have to reject the motion as it is overbroad, which could result in inadvertently waiving privilege and, where related to self-represented litigants, could involve important advice on security that needs to remain confidential. But we will happily table several studies on legal aid that may be useful to the member.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Is there another member who wishes to speak to Motion for a Return 25?

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to close debate.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It saddens me to hear that we can't bring forward copies of the studies or briefing notes. I do understand that the government has concerns about being overbroad. When this has happened, they have made amendments or adjustments to the motion for a return, but in this case they just decided to outright reject it.

[Ms. Sweet in the chair]

I will say, though, that it's encouraging to hear that the Minister of Finance has said that he's going to have the Minister of Justice put forward some of the studies that have been put forward. I thank the minister for that. It is something, and I'm glad to hear that.

But in the end what we're trying to do is say that – and I heard the minister say that they've added a whole bunch of resources to legal aid. My concern here is that what we're not clear on is exactly how these resources should have been applied. A briefing or a study is a good route, to be able to go that route. I'm not sure if the studies that the Minister of Justice will be tabling are all going to be public studies that we would have had access to anyway, but I am hopeful as I put more requests for information for legal aid, because this is something that I am impassioned on. Once I go through the studies, I will be more focused in my requests. I want to make sure that our most vulnerable have access to being able to defend themselves in the courts. Right now I've heard the minister saying that they're bringing down the number of requests. Without any information on my side to be able to verify that, again I will accept that the minister has information that is clear to that answer that he's given.

Again, I'm very saddened to hear that they're rejecting it, but I am glad to see that the ministry is at least making an effort to get something to my office. So thank you, Minister.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion for a Return 25 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:18 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Starke
Barnes	Loewen	Strankman
Cyr	Orr	Taylor
Gotfried	Smith	van Dijken

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Ganley	Payne
Babcock	Goehring	Piquette
Bilous	Hinkley	Renaud
Carson	Horne	Rosendahl
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Schreiner
Connolly	Littlewood	Sigurdson
Coolahan	Loyola	Sucha
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Sweet
Dach	Malkinson	Turner
Dang	McKitrick	Westhead
Drever	Miller	Woollard
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	

Totals:	For – 12	Against – 35
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[Motion for a Return 25 lost]

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

Bill 6 Draft Document

M28. Mr. Strankman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the three-column document used in the drafting of Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak about the motion that I had submitted for a return. Simply, what I was trying to do was achieve more information for the electorate of Alberta going forward. I simply and wholeheartedly believe that it's important that Albertans affected by this legislation understand the rationale behind how and why the bill was developed. I think it's important that internal legislative communications be presented to Albertans in an open fashion.

Many Albertans believe that the presentation of this legislation was flawed from the very beginning. At one point we saw significant numbers, well beyond 1,500, on the steps of the Legislature, and we had seen several demonstrations against the legislation throughout the province in many forms. Albertans were passionate about the government moving forward with what they believed was quite probably more of a labour bill than a bill for agriculture. So it's with that in mind, Mr. Speaker, that I was asking the question: was this always intended as an agriculture safety bill, that morphed into a labour relations and employment standards bill? That's part of the rationale behind the questioning, trying to learn about what was concerning Albertans and primarily constituents that I represent.

Mr. Speaker, given the confusion last year when concerned Albertans who wanted information were shunted back and forth between the ministry of jobs, skills, training, and labour and the ministry of agriculture, providing us the documents used to develop the bill, I believe, is crucial so that we have the opportunity to view this internal rationale so that Albertans, including those of us in opposition, can understand the presentation of it.

There were numerous instances where the government's own web pages changed and contradicted previous positions throughout the process. Now, I'm willing to be compassionate to miscommunication and misrepresentation of potentially proper information, but in this case it deals with business acumen for agriculture, the second-largest industry in the province. As I said earlier in my preamble, we saw a massive number of demonstrations against the legislation throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve answers from a government that passes legislation and then determines the regulations. That was one of the frustrations that we saw demonstrated by Albertans coming forward. They had no knowledge or understanding of the regulations that were going to be encompassed in the legislation. It's a process that should be properly adhered to as government brings forward legislation in the House.

So I'd like to hear the government's response to that. I understand that the request has been simply rejected. I'd be anxious to hear the government's response to our submission.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This motion for a return asks for a copy of the three-column document in relation to the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. The three-column document used in the drafting of Bill 6 is a document of cabinet. Cabinet confidentiality prohibits us from sharing cabinet documents with anyone who is not a member of cabinet.

Thank you.

3:40

The Speaker: Are there any members who wish to speak to the motion?

Seeing and hearing none, closing comments?

Mr. Strankman: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I heard the member speak in that regard, but it is also an instance of obfuscation by the government to allow further education and understanding of what the rationale for their legislation is. Through this whole process, demonstrated to by thousands of Albertans, there's no methodology coming forward for the rationale for the legislation. Even though we may have chosen the exact words that the minister is relying upon to refuse our request, I think it's incumbent upon a government compassionate to Albertans to help them understand the rationale for their legislation.

[Motion for a Return 28 lost]

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Bill 6 Correspondence

M29. Mr. Strankman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence relating to the change in responsibility for the regulations for Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, from the Ministry of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was simply waiting for *Hansard* here. It's imperative that we try and record some of our conversations for the Assembly.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I am adamant about proof of an open and transparent government. Initially the bill was presented as a labour bill and then was transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. I believe it opens numerous acts, and the public needs to understand, again, the rationale for the presentation of what some initially believed to be a labour bill rather than an agriculture bill.

During the opening days of the public consultations they were shunted back and forth between the jobs, skills, training, and labour and the Agriculture and Forestry ministries, and that caused a lot of confusion amongst Albertans. In fact, the initial presentations in the community of Grande Prairie were done by the jobs, skills, training, and labour people, and then they were moved over to agriculture. So it bodes some confusion within the departments, and I'm anxious to try and provide information to Albertans.

While Bill 6 was described as legislation supporting agricultural safety, the published table topics included elements of labour and employment standards, and as we go forward with the round-table discussions, I understand that those discussions have been somewhat stymied or stalled or actually not even coming forward. So it's difficult to understand if this is still being dealt with in a labour fashion or an agricultural fashion and not brought forward.

The government claims that they are taking the time, Mr. Speaker, to get this bill right. It's unequivocal that Albertans and Alberta agriculture folks, many of them who have volunteered their own time and such to represent their organizations, came together with an agricultural coalition of many of these agricultural organizations to turn out for the round-tables that were to be promoted. But the government only allowed something less than one-third of the number of chairs that were available at the table to actually be represented by agricultural organizations. It's frustrating.

These organizations, these occupational health and safety round-tables, have not even finished meeting, and Albertans are wondering where the regulations are for this bill. As mentioned with Motion for a Return 28, there were numerous instances where the

government's own web pages changed and contradicted previous positions throughout the process.

Mr. Speaker, we're simply trying to get at, again sounding repetitive, the rationale for the government bringing forward a bill with regulations that haven't even been written yet without consequence. We saw in the final days of our 28th Session people and members and members of the government talking about fierce reactions from Albertans – and it was very emotional in the final days – that this government didn't understand how they had to relate to the constituents that they serve.

Mr. Speaker, given the government's opposition to amendments and, seemingly, taking this bill through the House, we aren't surprised that there's been little information given up from the freedom of information requests that we've made as well, the opposition, and even the media. We've learned that the media made serious requests to learn the information as well. So I'm anxious to hear what the government member has to say in response to this motion for a return that would appear to have been flatly rejected. Can we continue on with that discussion?

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act repealed exemptions for paid agricultural workers from existing protection and compensation legislation. The government is currently consulting with a broad cross-section of stakeholders regarding changes to the occupational health and safety standards. Consultations have concluded for employment standards and labour relations.

Mr. Speaker, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act in no way made changes to the minister responsible for these important worker protection laws. The Minister of Labour is the minister responsible for the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Employment Standards Code, and the Labour Relations Code. This has not changed; therefore, copies of all correspondence the member requests do not exist. Because these records do not exist, we're rejecting this motion for a return.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Motion for a Return 29. While I appreciate the Finance minister's comments, we are very, very familiar with what Bill 6 did. I appreciate the recap, but we have a pretty good working understanding of exactly what it did, and we're not looking for that. What we are looking for is access to information.

Mr. Ceci: It doesn't exist.

Mr. Cooper: I hear the minister saying, "It doesn't exist" – and that wouldn't surprise me – which is the exact problem, that the information doesn't exist or there was no correspondence relating to the change in responsibility because they don't even know how it happened. There was a significant amount of confusion in the government of the time, and it appears that there still is confusion with respect to who did what and how it was done. I think that Albertans should be very concerned and particularly those in rural Alberta should be very, very concerned that there was apparently no correspondence or communication related to the change in responsibility for the regulations for Bill 6.

3:50

We clearly saw the minister of jobs, skills, labour, and training at the time going around the province speaking about this. That

ministry was definitely the one responsible. I know that my hon. colleague from Drumheller-Stettler had personal correspondence – albeit I believe it was in voice mode, a phone call – between himself and the minister of agriculture’s staff speaking about the minister’s taking over that rollout. Clearly, he was informed somehow that he would then be leading this file, and now we’re being told by the minister that there is no correspondence.

Some might say that that’s difficult to believe because this is a very significant file – a very significant file – that, you’ll remember, Mr. Speaker, created a significant debate in this House both day and night. You’ll remember literally thousands of people on the steps of the Legislature, concerned about the future of agriculture. You’ll remember an amendment that was proposed in this House that was longer than the legislation. The reason why those things happened was because Albertans from pillar to post, from corner to corner expressed significant concern about the direction of this government. Somewhat to their credit, they introduced the amendment. They also rolled out a consultation process that, I’m sure you would agree, probably should have taken place prior to the passing of that legislation.

But this wasn’t just a moving of one small issue from one department to another. This wasn’t a scheduling error. This wasn’t a small communication piece between the ministers of agriculture and of Labour; this was a massive undertaking, that the government engaged in. And it’s only reasonable, Mr. Speaker, that those same people that came and rallied at the Legislature and expressed concern should be able to have access to the information, that is their information, about how and why that happened, about how and why it was in one department and then it was in another.

If it never actually changed, why did the lead spokesman become the minister of agriculture? Why is it that the minister of agriculture is the one responsible for the rollout of the tables? Frankly, it’s a little unfortunate that we didn’t realize way back when we asked this question about the ongoing efforts of this government and require them to table some of the work that’s taking place in that consultation work that’s currently ongoing.

I know that in the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, Mr. Speaker, there are members of the community that are on those tables and have expressed some significant concerns about how the government is still handling this file. Now, there are multiple people from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on those tables. Some are more positive than others with respect to the direction that it’s going, so I want to be fair with my comments. But the challenge that we face is that this government continually, week in and week out – the opposition comes and says, “Please allow Albertans to understand what’s going on inside the government,” and we hear the Minister of Finance saying that that correspondence doesn’t exist.

Well, it is a challenge. It is a stretch to believe that there was no correspondence around this issue, and it seems to me – it’s my guess, Mr. Speaker, that the government’s effort is to use the wording of the question to not actually answer the intent of the question. It’s more than a bit disappointing that this government chooses to not provide information to the thousands of Albertans that would have liked to know what happened way back last December. We must be very close to the one-year anniversary of that. To say that I’m disappointed would be an understatement. To say that I’m surprised – well, very little surprises me about this government’s lack of desire for openness and transparency nowadays.

So I will be supporting this question. I encourage all members of the Assembly, particularly folks like the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, who, during that period of time, I remember advocating on behalf of his constituents and expressing some of the same sort

of concerns – here’s an opportunity for him to vote in favour of this question because I know that there are folks in Leduc-Beaumont that would like to understand how these sorts of things took place and why that happened. I encourage all members, all private members to support this very important information. It is virtually impossible for it to not exist.

The Speaker: Are there other members who would like to speak to Motion for a Return 29?

Seeing and hearing no one, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler to close debate.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I can tell by the riveting attention by the members of government that this is first and foremost on their minds. So I’m looking for a robust debate or a robust turnout by voters to learn more information about what government does going forward.

Mr. Speaker, there are still staunch beliefs in rural Alberta that this legislation going forward, Bill 6, which my member for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills talks about, was a partisan piece of legislation simply trying to increase the government’s political base, and unionizing workers was part of that mandate. However that may go, whether that is or isn’t accurate, I know that there is a lot of concern.

Also, following up on the comments made by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the emotions, as you might recall, Mr. Speaker, in the last days of the fall session, particularly as exhibited by the Minister of Energy at that point in time, were very extensive. The Minister of Energy had great concerns, bringing forward that Albertans were voicing their opinions inappropriately, possibly, at some point in time. With that, my compatriot from Leduc-Beaumont also was subject to some of that vitriol of, you know, people bringing forward their opinions. It’s part of the democratic process that we’re allowed to achieve here and come forward.

I’m anxious to have the vote go forward on this motion for a return. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion for a Return 29 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:59 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	Strankman
Barnes	Orr	Taylor
Cooper	Starke	van Dijken
Cyr		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	Phillips
Babcock	Hinkley	Piquette
Bilous	Horne	Renaud
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Rosendahl
Ceci	Littlewood	Schreiner
Connolly	Loyola	Sigurdson
Coolahan	Luff	Sucha
Cortes-Vargas	Malkinson	Sweet
Dach	McKittrick	Turner
Dang	Miller	Westhead
Drever	Nielsen	Woollard
Fitzpatrick	Payne	

Totals:	For – 10	Against – 35
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[Motion for a Return 29 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Government Opposition House Leader.

Bill 8 Draft Document

M30. Mr. Cooper moved on behalf of Mr. Smith that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the three-column document used in the drafting of Bill 8, Public Education Collective Bargaining Act.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Motion for a Return 30.

I'd just like to provide a little bit of background on the question with respect to the three-column document and how we sort of got here. Bill 8 introduced a new model of collective bargaining between school boards, teachers, and the Alberta government. Until the passing of Bill 8 the history of collective bargaining in education in Alberta had been based on a model of local bargaining. Each school board would enter into bargaining with their local ATA and through negotiations arrive at a locally bargained agreement. Each school division would have the ability to negotiate a unique agreement surrounding wages, benefits, and local issues like professional development.

Prior to 1994 school boards had the power to requisition tax dollars by setting a local levy on municipal property taxes in order to pay for the negotiated settlements with teachers, aides, et cetera, and to fund their other costs of providing an education in their school divisions. This created a problem, that school divisions with a strong tax base could requisition more funds, and therefore some school divisions could provide more funding for education than could some others. With local bargaining some school divisions sometimes suffered when wealthier school boards would settle early, and with a collective agreement that was seen by some as too generous, this would place the poorer school divisions in a bit of a bind.

In the 1990s the then Premier tried to control government spending, and he recognized the inequity of the bargaining process of the day, so he moved to change the process by taking the money requisitioned through the property tax levies and pooling it into the government coffers and then distributed the money back to school boards using a per-student funding formula. This new process ensured a more equitable distribution of the education dollars back to school boards and at that time had an overwhelming support of divisions and teachers.

The problem that was created by the 1994 process revolving around bargaining: now, once the government has set their budgets and decided on the increase or decrease to the Education budget, this allocation of funds pretty much decided the range of monies that a school board had to negotiate within. From a school board's perspective, many felt that they were placed in an untenable position. They were able to negotiate in good faith, yet the largest negotiation piece, teachers' salaries, had already been decided by the government's budgeting process.

Teachers at the ATA were often unhappy with the new process for two reasons. Firstly, the decision on wages had already been decided in the budget before the local bargaining had even begun. Second, they were unable to bargain directly with the government, who was the direct funder. The result of these issues was a breakdown in the bargaining process.

4:20

It is because of this history that the Wildrose understood the desire of the present Minister of Education to address this bargaining model. Bill 8 formalized a province-wide two-table bargaining

system, where there are now local and provincial bargaining tables. The provincial table now addresses broad issues in common to all boards while the local table addresses issues that were best dealt with between the individual school boards and the ATA. The intent of having the provincial table is to ensure consistency across the province with respect to the big-picture issues in education such as wages and benefits. The intent of having the local table is to allow for flexibility for school boards to address issues that directly affect schools, teachers, and students.

Bill 8 established an employer bargaining association, the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association, or TEBA, to emerge in contract negotiations for school boards. Both central and local negotiated agreements must be ratified by the parties involved through their collective agreement.

Mr. Speaker, our request is to review the three-column document. It's well known that when the ministry begins preparing to draft a piece of legislation, a three-column document is used to help bring clarity to the creation of the bill. A three-column document is an instrument used to help plan and focus the preparation of the bill. A three-column document outlines the current legislation in one column. A second column outlines the proposed changes that will be incorporated into the new bill, and a third column provides the rationale or perhaps the goals that the government hopes to achieve by passing the bill into law. We have seen a fairly similar three-column document released recently with respect to MGA consultations on Bill 21.

We are in the middle of the most important set of negotiations, the government and school boards, represented by the TEBA, and the ATA, that represents the teachers. As the negotiations proceed, we will need to judge the effectiveness of the new negotiating model. Has the two-tiered system of negotiation been effective? Has the two-tiered system of negotiation been fair to stakeholders? Has the new negotiation model arrived at a contract that is fair for the taxpayers? Has the new model of negotiation successfully achieved the goals set out in the rationale? Is this what the government wanted to achieve?

Having the three-column document would provide a level of clarity and transparency that would ensure all Albertans would be able to see if the new model of negotiations should continue under the terms of the current legislation or whether the Legislature should consider amending Bill 8 in order to better achieve the intended purpose of the bill as expressed in the three-column document.

The Ministry of Education is planning on spending \$7.9 billion in the 2016-17 Education budget. The Minister of Education is responsible for the second-largest expenditure of public funds in the 2016-17 budget. The teachers' salaries make up the single largest portion of public funds within the Education budget, almost \$2.4 billion. When we start talking about these incredibly large sums of money, it is prudent to make sure that the new model of bargaining is achieving the goals of that legislation. Was it achieving what it set out to do?

By providing the three-column document and comparing the rationale to the results of the new bargaining model, Albertans will be better served as a result of transparency that occurs when a three-column document is available for all to see. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the government's prompt delivery of the three-column document.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Motion for a Return 30. What I can tell members opposite is that my response will be fairly prompt. I'd like to thank the member opposite as well

for Motion for a Return 30, respecting Bill 8, the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act. Three-column documents which are used in the drafting of government bills are privileged and confidential to cabinet and Executive Council. I'm pretty confident that members opposite are aware of this. Cabinet privilege is a substantive rule of law with roots in the Constitution, and as such it's my responsibility to ask this Assembly to reject the motion for a return.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to Motion for a Return 30?

Seeing and hearing none, I will call on the Opposition House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a bit of a shame that the Deputy Government House Leader has chosen to use cabinet confidentiality as an excuse. He knows that members of this Chamber, through the long-standing traditions of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* – and I know that I've raised this on a number of occasions here in the House with respect to the ability of the Legislature to summon documents and produce papers. A three-column document: it is a historical document. It doesn't reveal any secrets that would be important to the security or the safety of Alberta. Merely, it would provide information to this side of the House.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I know that I've said this over the last number of weeks, but it's not just about that this side of the House gets the information. It is about Albertans that want to understand how this government works and why they do what they do and what their actual motives are or aren't. I see no reason why the government wouldn't want to clearly communicate why. I don't see a reason why the government would not want to reach out and set the record straight. I hear from time to time members of this side of the House or the public make the suggestion that the government's intent is one thing, and the government's response is: oh, no, no, no; honest, that's not our intent. Well, providing information just like this, that we're asking for, would be proof positive of what their intention is. So it is more than a little disappointing that they've chosen not to provide this information, and I hope that they will reconsider in the future.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion for a Return 30 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:27 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Cyr	Starke
Barnes	Gotfried	Taylor
Cooper	Orr	van Dijken

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	Payne
Babcock	Hinkley	Phillips
Bilous	Horne	Piquette
Carson	Jabbour	Renaud
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Connolly	Littlewood	Sabir
Coolahan	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Sucha
Dach	Malkinson	Sweet
Dang	McKittrick	Turner

Drever	Miller	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	Woollard
Totals:	For – 9	Against – 36

[Motion for a Return 30 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Public Trustee Review Documents

M32. Mr. Cooper moved on behalf of Mrs. Pitt that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of internal working documents or reports prepared by or on behalf of the government from May 22, 2015, to March 7, 2016, pertaining to the review conducted by the Minister of Human Services to improve the management of the Public Trustee common fund as well as the reporting processes of the Public Trustee, as referenced in a government news release issued February 10, 2016.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today with respect to Motion for a Return 32 and move this on behalf of my colleague. I think that the Public Trustee provides a very, very important service to many Albertans. I think that it's reasonable that we find out exactly what is included in the review that clearly took place. The government issued a press release on February 10, 2016. It seems reasonable that members of the public would be able to receive the information that was put together for that review so that we could have a sense of exactly what transpired there.

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Member. In February of 2016 the Auditor General made two recommendations resulting from the conclusions of the December 2015 audit of the office of the public guardian and trustee. The recommendations related to surplus management, and they related to results reporting. The office of the public guardian and trustee agreed to those recommendations and has undertaken work to improve those two areas.

They are working with Aon Hewitt, an independent consultant, along with the Investment Advisory Committee to discuss these issues. Once a decision is made with respect to reporting, that will be public reporting. So that information will be public, how we report the OPGT's progress. The second thing, surplus: we certainly do report what the surplus is at, and if there will be any changes to that surplus, that will be reported publicly.

However, the hon. colleague for Airdrie has requested confidential and privileged documentation. Those internal documents provide advice to government; hence, I'm not in a position to release those documents. But I can assure the member and all Albertans that the changes that will be made as a result of our review will follow and will be public in terms of reporting surplus management. Therefore, I must reject this motion for a return requested by the MLA for Airdrie.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other members who would like to speak to Motion for a Return 32?

The hon. Opposition House Leader to close?

[The voice vote indicated that Motion for a Return 32 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:49 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Cyr	Taylor
Barnes	Gotfried	van Dijken
Cooper	Orr	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Phillips
Babcock	Horne	Piquette
Bilous	Jabbour	Renaud
Carson	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Ceci	Littlewood	Sabir
Connolly	Loyola	Schreiner
Coolahan	Luff	Sigurdson
Cortes-Vargas	Malkinson	Sucha
Dach	McKittrick	Sweet
Dang	Miller	Turner
Drever	Nielsen	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Payne	Woollard
Goehring		

Totals: For – 8 Against – 37

[Motion for a Return 32 lost]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Adoption Regulations

510. Ms Luff moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review section 85(1) of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and section 25(2)(d)(iii) of adoption regulation AR 187/2004 with a view to removing the prohibition on prospective adoptive parents that currently prevents them from advertising and publishing a profile.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to rise to speak to my motion, Motion 510. This is an issue that has been brought to my attention by several prospective adoptive parents in my constituency and, actually, around Alberta. These are people who have been trying to adopt in Alberta for some time and have been frustrated by the legislative provision that prevents Albertans who wish to adopt from publishing an online profile.

There are several websites out there now that allow couples seeking to adopt babies to post profiles of themselves, which can make it easier to find connections between birth parents and adoptive parents. This is a process that's allowed in several provinces: B.C., Manitoba, Ontario, and the Yukon. It can be frustrating for people here in Alberta to look elsewhere and see that people are able to post these profiles. It could make the adoption process less cumbersome and expensive, and folks here in Alberta aren't able to do this.

The people that I've spoken with make the case that everything is done online these days and that this piece of legislation is out of date. The only way for a prospective birth mother to make a connection is to reach out to an adoption agency, most likely by a phone call, and then go into an office to view copies of paper profiles. This can be an intimidating and time-consuming process, and having the ability to look at profiles online could make the process easier. Adoption is a wonderful thing that the government should be encouraging, so we should be looking to remove barriers wherever that's possible.

The people I have spoken to cite an opportunity to post a profile as something that could reduce discrimination due to age or income and something that provides hope to prospective adoptive parents. One parent that I spoke to said that as an adoptive parent, having the ability to post your profile online would be so helpful. It can be viewed by a birth mother or father in privacy across the province and can be shown easily to friends and family. Every method of getting the word out can count. Having an adoptive parent profile online increases awareness for open adoption for families, birth parents, and adoptive parents. It increases communication, knowledge, and would reduce wait times for many families. For those adoptive parents who are concerned about their privacy, it's no more public than paper profile copies we create for these agencies. There are settings or options where, if you don't want your profile shown online, it won't be shown.

One other constituent that I spoke to said the following:

I called all the private agencies in Calgary and as soon as I told them our ages the energy went down on the other [side] of the phone. My heart broke, and I felt like saying we have so much to offer a little one. There has to be [another] way other than going out of country to adopt which can be . . . 20,000-60,000 . . . [This] is why I have told you my story, can this law be changed. Many other provinces have recognized that this law was based on the past and that our society has changed as a whole which has become more informed. Can you please speak for us and help us expand our amazing little family?

I've heard many stories like this from people across the province who are waiting, who are waiting to expand their families and to be able to accept new children into their lives.

I'm very happy to be able to bring this issue to the Legislature today because I know that adoption has touched many lives. I myself am an adopted child, and I find that there is still a lot of stigma and misconception that can surround this issue. When I tell people that I'm adopted, I often get questions. They want to ask me all of these questions, and it's always preceded with: are you okay talking about this? There's some assumption that being adopted means that, you know, you weren't wanted or you were abandoned. But I always tell them: no, that's not true, and yes, I'm happy to talk about it. I'm happy to talk about it because adoption is really one of the greatest acts of love that somebody can be involved in.

5:10

My mom got cancer shortly after she was married, and she had to have a hysterectomy, which made it impossible for her to have children. An adoption provided her and my father with the ability to have a family. I'm adopted, and my brother is adopted, too. I was adopted in B.C. and my brother was adopted from Bolivia, so we have this wonderful family of different roots. We get along fabulously, and it's really been a fantastic experience. My brother and I, from as far back as we can remember, always knew that we were adopted. We never felt out of place, and we always felt loved and wanted.

As an adult I've had the opportunity to get to know my birth mom, which has been a really great experience as she's a pretty amazing woman in her own right. To choose to have a baby and to give it away to others is one of the bravest and most loving things that somebody can do. In getting to know my birth mom, I've discovered that politics are, in fact, genetic. It wasn't something that I talked about growing up with my family, but my birth mom was apparently out door-knocking for the NDP in the 1980 federal election, when I was in the womb. So, clearly, there's something that goes on there.

I've also found out through talking to her that options were pretty limited in terms of choice at the time. She was provided with some profiles to look at, and the main thing that she said that she looked

for in a prospective adoptive family was signs of feminism, so that's pretty fantastic also.

I can imagine how different that might have been today, being able to be in contact with prospective adoptive parents and being able to ask them questions. You know, children these days have the opportunity to be in contact with their birth parents and their families growing up so that you have all of that richness and love that comes with that. Adoption is a very different thing these days than it was when I was adopted. I can imagine that my life might have been different had I had the opportunity to know my birth parents growing up.

Since adoption is modernizing, we should be looking to modernize our laws as well. Adoption agencies are also open to this opportunity. They say that more and more birth parents are reaching out by e-mail and text and that being able to provide them with online profiles in the comfort of their own home would help to improve this process.

Now, all of this being said, what I'm asking for is a review of the legislation, and I want there to be lots of input from adoptive parents, adopted children, social workers, and people who work in adoptive agencies to make sure that whatever changes do come to this legislation, we get it right. I certainly see where limits and safeguards have to be in place that ensure the safety and well-being of children, and I think some of my colleagues who have more experience in this area will be speaking to this. Where special-needs children are concerned, for instance, it's crucial to ensure that prospective families are well suited and prepared so that any match made can be a permanent one.

In any review of this legislation I think there needs to be careful consideration of where online advertising works, where it's appropriate, and where it might not be. Overall, however, I feel that adoption is a wonderful thing, and we need to modernize this legislation to be more responsive to the needs of families.

I'm looking forward to more debate on this motion. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I continue to feel privileged to hear so much from the members in this House, these kinds of stories.

The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a few days, I understand, in a political career that you'll look back upon with real pleasure in the sense that good things have happened. There are a lot of days in the work that we do that aren't joyous occasions and sometimes can be very frustrating, and oftentimes we don't see eye to eye on issues in this place. So on a day like today I just want to say thank you so much. Thank you to the member for bringing this very important issue forward.

Mr. Speaker, in the name of full disclosure, you know that I have a particular passion for adoption. You know that I have three children. Each of them has a very special place in my heart, and two of them came to our family through adoption. Each one just brings such great joy. Around this issue of adoption there's often such joy and such pain, and it's just so important that we all use our voices to elevate the cause of adoption. So I want to thank the member for doing that today.

Many people in this House will know that recently, in conjunction with my colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View, who I know is going to have the opportunity to chat a little bit about it, we made an announcement of our intention in the upcoming session, or after prorogation, of introducing a private member's bill that will reflect much of what is reflected in this motion. It's my hope that we'll be able to work collaboratively through the review process

that the member has hopefully initiated today and that the government acts upon it and that we'll be able to deliver a piece of legislation that does just that, that addresses some of her concerns with ensuring that we advertise where appropriate and we don't otherwise and that the removal of the prohibition on advertising around adoption is done in a way that reflects all stakeholders.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, more important than what the motion does today, assuming that there is broad support for it, with respect to actually removing the prohibition or reviewing the legislation around removing the prohibition on adoption profiles is that it allows us an opportunity to speak about this very important issue around adoption. While this motion has a wonderful intent, this certainly isn't going to solve all of the problems around adoption, nor will the piece of private member's legislation that we intend to introduce in the spring, but it will really initiate a conversation about ways that we can talk about this critically important issue and talk about it in a way that reduces stigma, talk about it in a way that celebrates birth parents, talk about it in a way that minimizes the shame of pregnancy loss, and talk about it in a way that really builds up our families and builds up communities. That's so important to the future of our province.

Mr. Speaker, you've heard me speak about strong families creating strong communities and strong communities building a strong family, and that's really what adoption is about. It's about building strong families no matter what the face of that family is, but about building a strong family.

The department and adoption professionals all across this province – and I've spoken to lots of them – have identified some key concerns and needs that they have. I think it's wonderful that we have the opportunity to speak about that, things about breaking down stigma, things about breaking down the stereotypes that come along with adoption, things about breaking down the silos that exist between the Department of Human Services and the wonderful adoption professionals that exist in our province through private agencies, finding ways to have these organizations communicate better so that the adoption community can expand, because at the heart of all adoption professionals, be it in the department or private, is this unquenchable desire to make the best available decision for the needs of a child. There's no place better for a child than in the most ideal scenario, with their biological family, but where that's not possible, in a family that's going to be theirs forever.

So with everything that we can do, whether it's better training for front-line department workers with the available options around adoption or better training for them to work more collaboratively with the department, today is really the start of a conversation with respect to working together and championing a cause that's so critically important to our future.

I'm proud to be able to rise today and speak about that. I look forward to the passing of this motion and look forward to speaking about this during private members' business, hopefully in the spring.

5:20

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the motion brought forward by my colleague the MLA for Calgary-East. I would like to begin by acknowledging the critically important role that adoptive families play in promoting the health, safety, happiness, and well-being of so many of Alberta's children. I have had the opportunity to meet with several adoptive parents in my role as Minister of Human Services. I also have heard from

prospective adoptive families, many of whom are very excited to nurture a child and provide for their well-being and healthy development. I appreciate the members advocating for these families and for raising this important issue for debate in the Legislature.

I would also like to acknowledge the advocacy of the Official Opposition members, in particular my friend the MLA from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I know this is an issue that many members and many Albertans feel passionately about. Our government shares a deep concern for this issue, and we are always looking for ways to improve core supports and programs, including the adoption system, in our province. We will continue to listen to all parties as well as families and business partners and all relevant groups as we consider this issue.

Adoption is an important part of supporting strong families and building resilient communities. I want all members of this House and all Albertans to know that we are committed to ensuring that when children are no longer safe in their own homes or when a parent wishes to voluntarily put their child up for adoption, that those children have safe, loving, nurturing homes to grow up in. We will continue to support adoptive families and prospective adoptive parents. Part of this work includes removing barriers to adoption when removing those barriers is in the best interests of children and their families. It is critical that the adoption process provides children with the best outcome and meets the needs of families.

Choosing an adoptive family is a significant decision for any birth parent, and we should work to strengthen and support their decision-making when we can. We recognize that online advertising may support options for birth parents; however, we know that any decision regarding the well-being of children must be taken only after careful consideration and examination. Every case is different, and we need to look at these cases on a case-by-case basis.

There are several approaches to this issue across jurisdictions in Canada regarding online advertising for potential adoptive parents, and my ministry will be looking to see what can be learned from the debate today in the House and from these different approaches as we explore how we best support children and families with respect to the adoption process. We have flagged this issue for examination when the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act is reviewed next.

In the meantime I support this motion from my colleague. I appreciate this opportunity to hear more from the members on this issue, and I look forward to the debate today.

As well, I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-East for sharing her story with us today. Thank you very much for bringing forward this motion, and thank you, everyone, for sharing your views on this important issue.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to start out by thanking the Member for Calgary-East for sharing her story. It just gives such tremendous perspective, and it's greatly appreciated, so thank you for sharing that with us. It's wonderful.

Also, thank you to the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for your story. Because I have the privilege of knowing your beautiful family, it makes me extremely proud to be able to rise and speak to supporting this motion and, hopefully, moving forward further on the legislation through a private member's bill.

Eventually this motion is going to review section 85(1) of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and section 25(2)(d)(iii) of adoption regulation AR 187/2004 with a view to removing the prohibition on prospective adoptive parents that currently prevents them from advertising and publishing a profile. As has been said, many of the Members of the Legislative Assembly know that the

Wildrose on November 18 released recommendations to guide new legislation modernizing the adoption system in Alberta as well, which is very in line with the member's motion, the fact that the first recommendation we made was directly in line with this motion before the House today, updating current advertising legislation to reflect the use of modern technologies, especially allowing prospective adoptive families to be able to post profiles online.

The legislation protects children from being posted in advertisements on private websites, but what has happened is that it has unintentionally prevented Albertans from posting potential adoptive parents' profiles online. This is something that has probably led to less than ideal outcomes in these situations. What we're seeing is that other provinces in Canada have already allowed for this practice of posting potential adoptive parents' profiles, and it's received great success, so we would like to be able to catch up to that.

We've also recommended, on top of that, to implement mandatory visits by adoption professionals for adoptive families to ensure that they are aware that there are so many community resources that are available to them. We want to make sure that along with making sure that these profiles are updated and available, we're also making sure that we're following through with that. I had an opportunity to speak, actually, with Albertans as well on our second recommendation, on the importance of ensuring through regulations that this proper support is available to new and adoptive parents. It's just going to make the whole process flow better.

It's also our belief that a mandatory visit by adoption professionals for all types of adoptions, including direct-placement adoptions, would certainly ensure that the adoptive families are equipped with all of the important tools to raise their children. Currently a person can actually place a child for adoption through direct placement, but a home visit is not required at this point. The main purpose of the visit, obviously, would be to ensure that the adoptive parents are fully informed of all resources available through the adoption process. Through extensive consultation we believe that having a trained worker provide a list of available community resources is that next important step to making sure that the adoption process is lasting and successful for adoptive parents and for these children to find their forever homes.

The third recommendation from our plan on modernizing Alberta's adoption framework is to also strengthen the public health postnatal services, which, again, I think, falls very much in line with this motion. It removes the mandatory use of child and family services when a birth parent expresses interest in adoption. What that means is that we can help those front-line workers with expertise in the field. We can make changes to improve the adoption process for the parents, children, and the birth families, and then what will happen is that the strong communities and families can rally around these folks. We can do more to make the system responsive to modern needs of the adopted child, the guardian, and the birth families.

I'm so honoured – so honoured – to be able to rise and to have the opportunity to talk with all members about this important issue in the House today and to discuss the changes, the motion that the member has brought forward as well as some of the points that we'll be bringing forward on modernizing adoptions. It will provide a foundation for the private member's bill that will be presented during the next legislative session. I'm so hopeful that all members of the legislative body will obviously support this very positive motion and this common-sense initiative and, by doing so, in the same way will support upcoming legislation that will help to modernize these policies.

Thank you so much.

5:30

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and speak in support of this motion, conversation that I would like to have just around some of the potential options that could be discussed when the review occurs around adoption. Obviously, I was a child protection worker before I was elected. I actually worked as a kinship support worker for a while doing home assessments and placing children with kinship families, so I have worked through permanency, looking at PGAs, permanent guardianship agreements, and permanent guardianship orders through adoption. I've worked my way through the process with families in different capacities. As well, I have some personal experience with my extended family around international adoptions as well as adoptions within Alberta.

In saying that, I do have some cautions around online profiling. It's not that I'm against it. I believe that an adoptive family should have as much opportunity to be able to connect with biological families and to be able to have those conversations, but there is a process that has to come along with that. I hear the Official Opposition talking about: why does children's services need to be involved, and is there a way that we can look at modernizing the legislation so that that doesn't happen?

I mean, there is capacity for direct placements, where there is limited involvement with children's services. But part of the reason why children's services is involved on more occasions than not is the fact that it is ultimately the government's responsibility to ensure that children are safe, that we are doing all of the assessments that are required to ensure that the home is safe, that the family that they're being placed with is appropriate, and that all of those needs are being met.

So when we look at adoption websites and see biological families reaching out to adoptive families, my only caution is that there's a potential for vulnerable parents who may not have the cognitive capacity to understand what the adoption process looks like or really understand what adoption means in the context of permanency and the fact that, you know, it isn't an option to place a child for a short term and then want to have them back at some point. So it sets up the biological family as well as potentially the adoptive family to have an extremely hard and painful experience when either the biological family, you know, starts going through the process of adoption and then changes their mind or the child is placed with the adoptive family permanently and their forever home is set up and they are experiencing all of these positive things, and then all of a sudden the biological family comes back and says: well, I've changed my mind.

It's extremely important that children's services help with that process so that they can, you know, provide the counselling that's required for the biological parents. We can ensure that the biological parents understand when their child is going to be adopted that it is a forever home and that they can't come back in a year or six months and say, "Well, I've changed my mind; I would like my baby back" or young adult or, you know, any child, really. I mean, it's not just babies that get adopted. There are lots of different ages.

The other piece of that as well is that there is potential for supports through children's services. So if we're talking about the supports for a permanency program, which is financial plus emotional support for adoptive families or families with PGAs – if a child goes through the children's services system and has a permanent guardianship order and then becomes adopted, the government still has a responsibility to support that adoptive family. By choice; it's voluntary. I mean, it's not a requirement that we would go in and see that family, but

there is that capacity to provide that additional support for counselling, for special equipment, if required, if the child has a special need, and talk about sibling counselling. I mean, there are a variety of different things that can be supported not only for the child but for the adoptive family.

These are important things, definitely, I think, as we move forward and we review the legislation, that we look at the motion that is before us today. Those are things to consider. How do we do those things so that we're ensuring that we're protecting both the biological family as well as the adoptive family and the little person in between while still promoting a very important, long-term, forever home for children? Again, I have personal experience. I know how important this is. I also know the struggles that come with it through the process, so I just want to make sure that when we are doing it, we're doing it in a way that we're supporting more adoptive families and allowing this opportunity to occur but also making sure that everybody is safe.

I do support the motion. I just have some cautionary statements.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to stand today and thank the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this motion forward. I have a friend in my town of Bonnyville who, when I first was elected, said that this is a problem for him and his wife. His name is Curtis. I asked him to write me an e-mail, and I'd like to read the e-mail really quickly into the record because I think it's important to show that this reinforces where Calgary-East is going with this.

It says, "Good morning" to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

My wife and I are currently going through the process of adopting a child in Alberta. We are working with Adoption Options and we are now on the waiting list for a child. The wait for a child is approximately 2 - 3 years and the wait is completely out of our control as we have to await a birth parent [or parents] to select us.

Something that surprised my wife and I when we were going through the approval process is that we found out that waiting adoptive parents are not allowed to make it known on social media that we are looking to adopt a child nor are we allowed to announce that we are on the "approved list." This to us seemed archaic, and runs counter to other provinces/territories (namely BC, Ontario and Yukon) in Canada where these provinces/territories allow adoptive parents to make such announcements on social media. This puts potential adoptive parents in Alberta at a disadvantage to other prospective adoptive parents in other parts of the country. Often birth parents in Alberta will end up connecting with prospective adoptive parents in other provinces simply because they have online profiles.

Per the below email, it appear some of your fellow [Wildrose] MLAs [from Airdrie and High River] are already aware of this situation and as our MLA [I am] asking if you can also look into this and see if there is any way that this regulation can be altered [or] updated. Given how much society now utilizes social media, it would be beneficial to be able to use that tool to get the word out for potential adoptive parents.

I've included a link to the CBC news articles about this issue for your review [and] reference.

This article was Alberta Adoption Publicity Ban Challenged.

Thank you for your time and look forward to talking with you again.

From Curtis.

This is reinforcing exactly the concern that the Member for Calgary-East has brought forward. I take great pride in the fact that

one of my constituents also identified this as being a concern and that we are actually moving forward, it appears, as a group to correct, possibly, this unfortunate circumstance that is revolving around adoptive parents.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the time that you've given me to speak. I look forward to seeing the vote today.

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

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to this motion. I have heard from many of my own constituents in Lethbridge-West on this matter, and I am very pleased that the government has heard them. In particular, I am pleased that the Member for Calgary-East has been able to bring forward this motion on the matter of the online profiles given that it is something that prospective families in southern Alberta have been asking for for some time. It's always very gratifying when government can be responsive to some of these issues that have been happening for some time.

5:40

Now, certainly, issues related to adoption go back many years. My own older sister was born in 1967 to my parents, who were not married. Not really by choice that sister of mine, who I didn't know for the first 20 years of my life, was put up for adoption. Life has changed a lot in the almost 50 years – she's not going to like that I just indicated that she's almost 50. But there it is, Mr. Speaker; the math doesn't lie. You know, what that has really taught me is, first of all, that personality is very much genetic. I apologize to the members across the way, but, yes, there are two of us. The friendship as an adult that I have been able to form with my older sister, who is from both of my parents – what an honour it was to get to know her as an adult and certainly for my parents as well and for my dad, before he passed away, to get to know his own other grandchildren. What it really underlined for me is that adoption, in many of the first instances, is a women's issue because anyone can adopt a child, but only women, at least so far, can have babies.

So on the side of the folks who are moving forward with adoption as a choice, we need to make sure that these laws keep pace for them as well. I don't believe, Mr. Speaker, that in 1967 they supported my mother very well. A lot has changed so much for birth parents and for the better, but we know that we can make those changes work even more for families. I think the ability to look at these laws is important, the legislation, so that we can ensure that family reflects where we're at as a society. Family is defined broadly, and the more broadly it is defined, essentially, the more love we have access to in this world. I have certainly learned that about my own family, and as a New Democrat what I desire for myself, I wish for all.

I think it's important to remember, too, that adoption is also an LGBT issue because so many same-sex couples now move forward with adoption as a choice, and it's important that we make sure that we have those choices and, again, that family is defined as broadly as possible.

Finally, I believe that it's important for us to get it right on adoption because adoption is an important part of reconciliation and moving forward with intact families for indigenous peoples, Mr. Speaker. What we know about the tragedy of children in care, what we know about the foster system, what we know about many of these issues is that a large number of these children are indigenous. Having a family, no matter who that family is, is so important, and the legislation that we put around these issues is so important to that.

Now, I support this motion on the part of the Member for Calgary-East. I believe that these are very delicate matters, Mr.

Speaker, and as with all things related to family and to choice, whether it's in vitro fertilization, whether it's reproductive freedoms, whether it's adoption laws, we must proceed carefully, understanding the very human impacts of our actions as legislators, but we can and we should start with this matter of the online profiles. I know that I have heard it loud and clear from my own constituents. We should make sure that we do it right, and we should make sure that in this province family is defined by love, it is defined by caring, and it is defined by ensuring that we have the broadest interpretation possible of what it means to grow up in a family.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and to support this motion, brought forward by my colleague the MLA for Calgary-East, to facilitate finding forever homes for children who need one. Speaking about adoption is not easy. For many, be it the birth mothers and fathers, their family, the child of the adoptive parents, this brings forth strong emotions and often painful memories and ongoing pain. I would like to acknowledge this as we discuss the motion today.

Mr. Speaker, as an adoptive parent I am thankful for my two boys' birth parents, who put the boys as babies in an orphanage so that they could have a loving home that they could not provide. My husband and I did not select adoption as an easy solution. After years of monthly disappointments we realized that if we wanted children, we needed to consider adoption. Infertility is a devastating illness, an emotionally and physically draining monthly occurrence. By the time couples consider adoption, they often have had expensive in vitro procedures, drugs, and operations. They also most often have drained their savings. The birth of nephews and nieces, friends' children, and babies generally is an emotional minefield. I know that pain, and I understand the importance of facilitating putting together birth parents and prospective adoptive parents.

As intense as the pain of infertility, for birth parents there's a pain of a different kind. I want to honour birth parents and the difficult decisions that they make when they decide to seek an adoptive family for their child: thank you. I am glad that laws and policies have now made it possible for birth parents to keep in touch with the adoptive parents and their child and sometimes to be actively involved in their life through an open adoption.

Mr. Speaker, my husband and I did seek to adopt a child through a private agency in Canada, but as this proved to be a wait of a number of years, we ended up adopting in Thailand, where we worked for a number of years, adopting two toddlers through the government's social service department. We took our boys back to the orphanage when they were teenagers, and we were thankful for them to meet some of their original caretakers but also, most importantly, to witness the difficult decision that a mother made to entrust her child to the government orphanage.

The intent of this motion is to support local adoptive parents in matching children with parents with appropriate measures. Currently Albertan adoptive families are not able to advertise online, and we need to modernize this to facilitate adoption and to ensure that children have a forever home. Choosing an adoptive family is an important choice for birth parents, and online advertising allows access to options. Both sides face so many hurdles as it is, and making the connection process as straightforward as possible is going to go a long way. Adoptive families go through a thorough home study before adoptions are finalized, so any online profile is not the final word or knowledge of the prospective adoptive parent.

Posting a profile online is more the beginning of a conversation that facilitates finding a home for a child.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to vote on this motion that urges the government to review the relevant sections of the mentioned legislation and, through consultation with stakeholders, to remove the prohibition on online posting by prospective adoptive families.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Seeing and hearing no other members who wish to speak to the motion, I would give the opportunity to Calgary-East to close.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was wonderful tonight, one of these rare nights that we get in the House where both sides agree on an issue. It's always nice to be here on those nights.

Adoption really is something that has touched so many lives. I think that talking about it more and removing barriers and educating people is something that is really worth our time here in the Legislature, both to talk about how great adoption can be as well as how heart-wrenching and painful it can be to be a waiting adoptive family. I do thank the Member for Sherwood Park for sharing her story from the other side, myself as an adopted child and hers as an adoptive parent.

5:50

I also want to thank the folks who took the time to come forward

and share their stories with me. This is what can happen when concerned citizens get out and talk to their MLAs about issues. So I thank the folks who brought this to me, particularly April Boettcher, who first brought this to my attention, and also Valerie Bielenda, who is here in the gallery tonight with her husband, Mark, and her mom, Noelle, to watch the debate.

So I just want to take this opportunity to say thank you to all the people who brought this forward for the opportunity to talk about how wonderful adoption can be. I guess I should thank both my moms, also, for, you know, helping me get to where I am today and my dad, too, and my brother and everyone who made our family as wonderful and loving as my family was growing up.

I would encourage everyone to support this motion. I think everyone is on board. Let's do what we can to reduce barriers to families and people who are waiting to welcome babies and children with love into their families right now.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 510 carried unanimously]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising because I think we've had some very positive, robust discussion this afternoon, and seeing the time, I will move that the House stand adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:52 p.m.]

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