



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, December 1, 2015

Day 26

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)	McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND), Deputy Government Whip
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Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)	Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)	Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)	Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
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Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)	Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)	Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)	Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
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Jean, Brian Michael, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W), Leader of the Official Opposition	Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)	
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)	

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 1, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Magna Carta

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we begin, I want to share a message with you. I've managed to arrange for the Sergeant-at-Arms to be standing while I give this message. Earlier this week Magna Carta: Law, Liberty & Legacy opened in the Borealis Gallery in the federal building. This exhibit is quite a unique experience for Albertans to enjoy free of charge.

In addition to encouraging your constituents to visit the Magna Carta exhibition, you can also bring the Magna Carta story to them. A program has been developed that provides your constituency with its own version of the Magna Carta. A special Magna Carta package will be delivered to your office with instructions, educational information, and a scroll.

Today important documents are shared in an instant; 800 years ago great ideas expressed on parchment had to be mailed. That situation has changed.

I do hope you take advantage of this opportunity and share it with all of the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two grade 6 classes from the Edmonton Christian northeast school. With them today are two teachers, Mr. Greg Gurnett and Ms Elaine Junk, as well as parent helpers Mr. Chris Maluta, Mrs. Amy Jeffery, Mr. Jason Visser, Ms Ilda Dias. I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the wonderful class from Millwoods Christian school that is enjoying the School at the Leg. program this week. I hope they're enjoying themselves. With them is their teacher, Mr. Nathan Marshall. I'd like to ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups to be welcomed today?

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a guest that is near and dear to my heart. Pat Nixon is seated in your gallery today. Pat is truly one of my great heroes. He came to this province as a homeless teenager and would go on start the Mustard Seed in Calgary in 1984, an organization that would eventually care for 1,100 people who experience poverty and homelessness daily, and

would mobilize more than 11,000 volunteers a year to fight poverty in this province. Pat to this day still works helping those in need, and his newest role is as the executive director of Oxford House.

Pat hates it when we talk about his accomplishments, but I will mention a few. In 2001 he was named Calgary citizen of the year. In 2005 he became a member of the Order of Canada, and in 2007 he was inducted into the Alberta Order of Excellence. In addition to his many accomplishments in his career, he is also an accomplished family man, a fact I know as I am the eldest of his six sons. He, together with my mom, always challenged us to reach for the stars and provided us with an amazing childhood. The accomplishments of all of his boys is a testament to his dedication to his family.

My dad has played many roles in my life along the way, Mr. Speaker, but I will introduce him through you to this Assembly in the role that I value the most, and that is as my friend. I know there are members from all parties in this Assembly and across all aisles that are proud to call Pat their friend and know the value of that friendship. With that said, I would ask Pat Nixon, my dad and my friend, to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. member, I do hope that you are the biggest one, that there aren't ones bigger than you.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the grandparents of one of our pages, Andriy Krugliak. Andriy started as a page in August of this year and is a valued member of our team. Before moving to Canada, he lived in Ukraine, where his grandparents still reside. But today Volodymyr Sukhariev and Lidiia Krugliak are here to watch their grandson hard at work in the Legislature. They are seated in your gallery. They've already risen. I'd ask that we all give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Michelle Merchant and Ellen Molloy. Michelle works part-time at the Edmonton-Glenora constituency office. She brings great experience as a social worker as well as a psychologist, having worked in child and family services and mental health. Ellen is completing her practicum in the constituency office as a first-year social work student. Previously, Ellen had eight years of medical training experience in the military. Through this and her work with the RCMP she has brought a focus on first responder support and advocacy. I'm very proud to have these two skilled women as part of my team in service to the citizens of Edmonton-Glenora. Will Michelle and Ellen please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you three special guests today. Patti and Don Machell are from the small town of Cereal, Alberta. Don spent 32 years and Patti spent 25 years teaching students in the Prairie Rose school division. They worked hard to bring passion to the classrooms and to make an impact on rural students' lives while also running a family farm. The farm has been in the Machell family for more than a century. Don and Patti are the parents of Aileen Machell, who is the press staff for the Human Services ministry.

They are joined by their son-in-law Matt Buchi, who recently moved to Edmonton from Prince George, B.C., where he worked at the University of Northern British Columbia as an AV technician, helping students in the medical program. It's my pleasure to ask my distinguished guests to rise and accept the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several guests who are here with us in recognition of World AIDS Day. Shelley Williams is the executive director of HIV Edmonton, and Leslie Hill is the executive director of Calgary's HIV Community Link, both valuable organizations that provide education, prevention, and support across Alberta.

Maggie McGinn is also in the gallery. She's my mother and an HIV-positive person who is a tireless advocate for persons with HIV. Her contributions are numerous but include serving as the executive director of the Edmonton persons living with HIV society for over a decade and serving multiple terms on the boards of CATIE and CTAC.

Also joining them in the gallery today are Ray Chorney and Marlo Cottrell, advocates and persons living with HIV, as well as ACCH co-ordinator Ferdinand Langit. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

1:40

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a close friend of mine, Mr. Jason Kropp; his wife, Patricia Kropp; and their three boys, Mackenzie, Carter, and Caius Kropp. Now, if I were to describe some of the things that Mr. Kropp has gotten up to in his time, I may have to resort to unparliamentary language. The good news is that he would also probably say the same things about me. It's that mutually assured . . .

Mr. Cooper: Safety first.

Mr. Clark: That's right

. . . destruction that keeps, I think, a friendship strong. I would ask the Kropp family to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my constituency staff. Heather Belanger is a caseworker and constituency assistant for Edmonton-Manning. She has spent many years in the field of human services, assisting the community in northeast Edmonton. Her ability to listen to constituents and assist in times of struggle has proven to be very valuable in our constituency office. She is an excellent advocate for Edmonton-Manning. Her laughter and easygoing disposition make the office a welcoming place for all of my constituents. Michael MacLean is a constituency assistant for Edmonton-Manning. His ongoing work within the constituency has been praised by many of my constituents, and I am extremely thankful not only to have his commitment to his work for all Albertans but also his willingness and patience in dealing with me. I will now ask both Heather and Michael to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is my maiden introduction. [interjections] It's my pleasure today to rise – thank you – and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly four guests joining us today from the Alberta Bottle Depot Association. I'd ask them to rise as I call out their names. Trevor Nickel is the president of the ABDA, representing and advocating for 216 independent small and medium-sized businesses that collectively are the point of return for about 2.1 billion beverage containers annually. He is joined by colleagues Jeff Linton, president of the Beverage Container Management Board, who has more than 30 years of management experience across multiple disciplines; and Guy West, president of the Alberta Beverage Container Recycling Corporation. Guy has been involved in beverage container stewardship since 1989. Guy also serves as director of the Recycling Council of Alberta. Also joining them today is Karim Dossa, owner and operator of the Beddington Heights Bottle Depot, located in my constituency of Calgary-Northern Hills, which has been a growing and successful family business since 1986. I'd ask all members to give our guests the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my absolute joy to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my excellent constituency staff. Alan Parish is my constituency manager and works around the clock to ensure that our office runs smoothly and that the people of Edmonton-Castle Downs are well taken care of when they contact our office. Heather Belanger is our caseworker and works relentlessly to help solve the many issues that arise on a daily basis that my constituents may need assistance with. Cassidy Green recently joined our office as part of her social work placement, and I'm so pleased to have her on our team. I'd ask them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a wonderful organization in my constituency, the Somali Canadian Women and Children Association. They're a nonprofit organization proudly serving all of Edmonton and the surrounding area that recognizes, responds to, and focuses on the unique concerns and needs of women, children, and holistic families, especially, of Somali Canadian women and their families. Visiting us today are Bob Walker, treasurer; Ahmed Ali, vice-chair; Jaamac Jaamac, board member; Kahye Dubow, youth manager; and Sahra Hashi, executive director. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House five Calgary-West residents who have travelled to the Legislature today for question period. From the Discovery Ridge Community Association are Jacquie Hansen-Sydenham and Ben Lee; as well, from the Springbank Hill Community Association: Fiona Christiaansen, Marshall Naruzny, and Elio Cozzi. These residents are all tireless activists for our community, and I thank them for being here today. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to stand and please receive the traditional welcome from this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to stand today and introduce to you and through you two wonderful women in my life.

An Hon. Member: Wonderful.

Mr. Hanson: Wonderful.

The very first is my wife of 34 years, Donna, my best friend for 36. The second is my daughter Nikita. She is an RN working here in the city of Edmonton and one of the reasons that I stand up proudly and defend front-line health care workers. I would like them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on your collective behalf I would like to welcome all of our guests here today. You've heard today that there are many family members that are with us. I know I speak for all of you that the important stuff that we do in here only happens because of the family support we have at home. You should all be proud of them.

I would also apologize to one of the members. In fact, through my error I did not recognize him yesterday for some guests. If by chance in the future I am not able to see you, don't be afraid to maybe wave a little bigger.

Members' Statements

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

World AIDS Day

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, December 1, is World AIDS Day. Today is meant to highlight the enormity of the pandemic and each nation's responsibility to ensure universal treatment, care, and support for people living with HIV. The theme of World AIDS Day 2015 is Getting to Zero: zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and stigmatization, and zero AIDS-related deaths.

This virus does not discriminate. World-wide the fastest growing number of those infected are women. In Alberta 1 in 4 persons living with HIV is a woman. Odds are that you know or have met someone infected or affected.

I was born to an HIV-infected mother, who did not know she was positive, and while I did not contract the virus, my family and I live with the stigma every day. When I was about six years old, we attended a candlelight vigil to remember those lost to the virus. I recall sitting on my mother's lap and asking if she was HIV positive. She didn't lie to me; she told me that she was. I asked if she, too, was going to die. At the time our reality was that I would lose my mother before my 12th birthday. The fear of discrimination due to stigma meant that I kept this to myself.

Today my mother sits in the gallery – well, she stands in the gallery – expecting her first grandchild, whom we never thought she'd live to meet.

While persons living with HIV are living longer than ever before, the stigma remains, and while I am in a position to speak out about my family, not everyone is or feels that they can. Valuable organizations like HIV Edmonton, Calgary's HIV Community Link, and ACCH advocate against the stigma and discrimination, promote prevention, provide community support to those living with HIV, and educate all Albertans.

Today, this World AIDS Day, help us get to zero. Start by getting educated.

Thank you.

[Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I must say that I continue to be amazed when I hear speeches like that. I tie it back to the point I talked about, our family members. We should all be very proud of each other that those kinds of stories can be told here on behalf of all Albertans.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: I feel the need to mention – and I speak now because I won't be heard later on – that the volume in the House tends to creep on certain days, so I want to remind you all to please allow me, the members to hear. Handle your volume and probably your tone more judiciously than you have in the past.

With that message, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Jean: Yesterday 1,500 Alberta farmers rallied at the Legislature in opposition to Bill 6. Their message was simple: they want consultation, not dictation, and until that happens, kill Bill 6. This morning the Premier admitted that she's lost the trust of Albertans over Bill 6, but who's fault was that? Not hers, of course. It's the bureaucrats' fault. A failure to communicate, she says. She should be ashamed of herself. If the Premier wants to restore the trust of Albertans, blaming faceless bureaucrats will not cut it. Why won't she just kill Bill 6 and hold meaningful consultations with Alberta's farmers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There certainly has been misinformation on this issue, and it has come from official channels. We sincerely apologize for that and are working to rectify it.

I find the irony of the member opposite, who comes into this House and beats up on public services every day, talking about cutting billions of dollars from the budget, astounding. [interjections]

The Speaker: Could the hon. minister please finish her remarks? Were you finished? It was so hard to tell if you were finished or not.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure I'll have an opportunity to add more in subsequent questions.

Mr. Jean: It's my job.

It's clear the NDP don't understand farmers. No one in the government actually depends on farming as a livelihood. The new carbon tax will raise the cost of operating the family farm, driving vehicles, turning the lights on, operating farm equipment, and new changes being rammed through by the NDP will dramatically change how the farm operates. But the Premier is pushing harder on the gas pedal. This is wrong, stubborn, and simply out of touch with Albertans. Why does the Premier believe she needs to ram through her attack on family farms all across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill is specifically about ensuring that paid farm and ranch employees have the same rights and protections as employees on every other work site. Every

other province in Canada has implemented these reforms, and they continue to have successful family farms, and we will in Alberta, too. We've certainly heard some feedback from farm communities, and we are acting on that through amendments.

Mr. Jean: Over 45,000 farms are being hit hard by bad NDP policy. Carbon taxes, dramatic changes to farmers' livelihood: it's all creating fear and uncertainty. Farmers want this government to go back to the drawing board. They want the same respect municipalities are getting through the Municipal Government Act review. They're tired of the Premier, ministers, and bureaucrats patronizing them. They're tired of consultation meetings becoming come-and-be-told-how-it's-going-to-be meetings. How can the Premier expect any farmer in Alberta to trust them again after this direct attack on their way of life?

Ms Hoffman: This legislation is geared at ensuring that people who are injured, or, God forbid, killed on the work site have some protections. That's the point of this legislation, Mr. Speaker. I know the member opposite wants us to sit on our hands and wait another six months while people continue to be at risk, but we're not going to do that. We're going to keep working, moving forward together, in partnership, and we are absolutely willing to bring forward amendments. We've said that, but the member opposite just wants us to sit on our hands, and we're not going to do that.

Mr. Jean: If you were so right last week, you wouldn't be pushing amendments today.

Royalty Review

Mr. Jean: We know the NDP are hammering farms across the province, but companies are rapidly losing confidence in Alberta's energy sector. According to a new survey Alberta has plummeted as an attractive place to invest. Top reasons: political turbulence and bad policies, carbon taxes, business taxes. It's all making things much, much worse. Albertans are very worried. The NDP have made it clear that royalties are going up, and companies are shutting down. What does this government have to say for all those Albertans who will now be out of work as a result of your policies?

Ms Hoffman: I know the Leader of the Official Opposition thinks that the way to have a balanced budget is to lay off thousands of front-line workers, Mr. Speaker, and we're not going to do that. We're going to stand up for what Albertans voted for us to do. While the Leader of the Official Opposition might have no intention to actually implement things they campaigned on, this government does.

Mr. Jean: The only one cutting front-line jobs here is you.

A panelist from the NDP's royalty review recently said that there are, quote, elements of the industry that cannot be competitive. End quote. Engineers, geologists, administration staff, rig workers, honest and hard-working men and women will all be hit hard by the NDP's economic experiments. A new royalty review is creating further instability, which results in more money leaving our province very quickly. NDP policies are out of touch, and they're losing the trust of Albertans. Why does the NDP insist on kicking Albertans when they're already down?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We were elected to stand up for families, to stand up for jobs. That's the Alberta way. That's why we brought forward a budget that has balance: balance in maintaining services, balance in making sure that we're investing in job creation, a philosophy that the members

opposite fail to see the merit in but that Albertans do. That's why we're going to create up to 27,000 jobs each year for the next two years. We're working with industry. We've created a ministry that's focused on this. We're actually working to build jobs and build the Alberta economy.

Mr. Jean: One hundred thousand Albertans are now unemployed. Their number one priority is getting back to work, but all the NDP can talk about is jetting around the world, taxing everything, hurting businesses, raising power bills for all Albertans, and attacking family farms. This royalty review has the potential to be the final blow to an economy already on the ropes. Why does the NDP care more about their own risky experiments than doing what's best for Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: I know the Leader of the Official Opposition finds it hard to keep his promises, but we are absolutely committed to doing that. He campaigned on bringing forward legislation to ban floor crossing, but we haven't seen that yet, Mr. Speaker.

We are absolutely committed to fulfilling our promises. We promised to bring forward a review of royalties, and we're committed to doing that. Former governments, that are no longer in power, failed to do that, and Albertans failed to believe their future commitments around royalty reviews. We've promised to do this. We're doing it. We're going to make sure that we get value for Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Quarterly Fiscal Update

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, section 11 of the Fiscal Management Act requires the Minister of Finance to make public "the actual results of the fiscal plan for the first 6 months of the fiscal year, on or before November 30 in that year." That was yesterday. Every Finance minister since Jim Dinning has more or less faithfully provided a quarterly fiscal update, but today we find ourselves with a Finance minister who has for the first time broken the law. Can the minister tell us why he has broken the law and failed to provide Albertans with the fiscal update?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, which I tabled before this House, it said that we will not bring that in for November 30 because we are bringing a budget in. We tabled a budget on October 27. There's no need for a November 30 update.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The minister knows perfectly well that he has not passed Bill 4; it has merely been tabled in this House. The minister has not given any justification as to why we shouldn't get a quarterly update. These laws exist for a reason, to prevent politicians from spending beyond their means without any accountability. Perhaps the reason he has neglected to follow our fiscal laws is because the numbers are embarrassing. Can the minister tell us whether the projected deficit and debt for this year are higher or lower in the budget than they are in his phantom fiscal update?

2:00

Mr. Ceci: We have reported, Mr. Speaker. It's called Budget 2015. The deficit in Budget 2015 is \$6.1 billion.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The minister is not answering the question, and he knows it.

This is an unacceptably dangerous precedent that the minister will be setting, breaking the law one day and then passing a law a week later, making it retroactively legal for him to break that law.

DBRS has predicted that they will run right through their debt limit before they stop borrowing. Do you see that this hurts your credibility, when you play fast and loose with our fiscal laws? Will the minister explain to this House why Albertans should trust the government with our finances when they can't follow their own laws?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I am not familiar with the exact details in the amount of time, but I feel uneasy, and I want to caution you with the use of the phrase "breaking the law" in the House.

Mr. Ceci: DBRS yesterday reported triple-A rating stable. The other thing I would say is that our fiscal plan and transparency act set out our financial regulation for this province. We will be following those, and we have reported on our deficit.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday the jobs minister told this House that the buck stops with her on Bill 6. That was a positive statement. Then, to my surprise, Albertans were told on Tuesday that the Premier blames government officials for the miscommunication. Now, that is a far cry from the level of responsibility Albertans should get from their Premier. To the minister of jobs: does the buck still stop with you on Bill 6, or do you agree with the Premier on throwing all the staff under the bus?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely admire family farms, and we want to work in partnership with them. There were mistakes made through official channels, and we take responsibility for that. Moving forward, we've assured that there will be cabinet ministers on all of the consultations happening throughout Alberta. There is one happening right now in Red Deer, and we've got two cabinet ministers in attendance. I want to say thank you to Albertans for stepping up and working with us to make sure that this provides safety and also honours the role that a variety of farmers play in being experts in their own field.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems the cat's got the labour minister's tongue.

Given that the Premier has decided to blame the staff, the hard-working members of the public service that operated under her political direction on Bill 6, can the labour minister tell us: does she agree with the Premier? Do you blame your officials, or does the buck still stop with you and the Premier?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. I think what's really important to know is that we're listening to farmers and that we brought forward an amendment today that we're working on. They asked us to put it in writing explicitly. It was our intent all along to do that in the regulations that would come out in 2017, so we're very proud. This is democracy in action. We're listening to farmers, and we know everyone is working together on that.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty crowded under the bus now with the minister, with the staff, with farmers, with ranchers. There's no room under there.

But minister, again, since the Premier has dismissed your botched consultation that you claimed to do, will you commit today to showing up in person for all future consultations so that there's at least a slight chance you might get it right on Bill 6?

Ms Sigurdson: Well, I think it's pretty obvious that this is democracy in action, that we actually are listening, and that we're putting forward amendments. This is how it works, and I'm very proud to stand here and know that the public servants, our government are really taking this seriously, that this is very much a true consultation process, and that's why we're bringing this forward.

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

Violence against Women and Girls

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to December 10, Human Rights Day, the world has united in 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. This is a time to take action to end violence against women and girls. Twice an hour, every hour Calgary police respond to a domestic conflict call in which 1 in 5 calls involve actual physical violence. To the Minister of Human Services: what initiatives is this government taking to support social programs already in place to protect the victims of domestic violence?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ending gender-based violence is important to all Albertans, and it's a priority for our government. I thank the member for her advocacy on this important issue. What we are doing is stabilizing the funding for social services, and we have invested in women's shelters to provide wraparound supports for the women and children fleeing violence. We have restored the cuts proposed by the previous government to family and community supports programs. These initiatives will help . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that domestic violence is on the rise in Alberta and the strain on these social programs is increasing, again to the minister: how does the 2015 budget address the strain?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member. The member is correct that demand for Alberta social programs has increased, and the 2015 budget for Human Services represents a 4.6 per cent increase over the last year actual. What we have done is restore the cuts proposed by the previous government to the Human Services budget, and we will make sure that we provide all needed supports to Albertans during these tough times.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister for Status of Women. Given that one of the largest barriers toward dealing with domestic violence is awareness, what is this government doing to promote these services so that Albertans who desperately need them are aware of these programs and, more importantly, have access to them?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, Albertans need to feel safe in their communities and in their homes. There have been far too many accounts of intimate partner violence and gender-based violence in Alberta in the past few months. Our government works in partnership with many community organizations to raise awareness of services for survivors. A few of the ways we are raising awareness right now include supporting the UN's UNiTE to End Violence against Women Orange the World campaign. This Sunday marks the anniversary of the École Polytechnique massacre, December 6, and many MLAs and department staff will be attending the commemorations. We need to do better, and we will.

International Trade

Mr. Malkinson: Mr. Speaker, with the price of oil falling below \$40 per barrel, my constituents are concerned about the economy. I spent the last four years working in the diesel generator business, and they are feeling this drop in the price of oil. When I talk with them, they tell me that it is time to look for new markets. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what are you doing to promote increased ties for Alberta businesses in Asia?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member for his very pertinent question. We are very supportive of diversifying Alberta's economy, expanding new and existing markets, which includes a strategic and cost-effective international presence. Now, I'll educate the members of the House in the fact that we have 11 international offices, primarily focused in the Asia Pacific area: Beijing, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Seoul, Shanghai, Singapore, Taiwan, and in addition, Mexico City, New Delhi, London, Washington, DC.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:10

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you just mentioned that there are eight international offices in Asia and two offices in China, can the minister explain the benefit of these offices to Albertans?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite happy to talk about the benefits that these offices provide. As a trade-focused province our ongoing success is tied to how well we can seize opportunities in new markets and leverage opportunities in existing markets. This is why expanding access to markets in key global areas, particularly the growing Asia Pacific region, will remain a vital part of the work that my ministry does. Last year international offices facilitated nearly 200 negotiations, resulting in 33 trade deals or investment projects here in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that finding new markets will promote economic diversification in Alberta, again to the same minister: what are you doing to help promote Alberta's business interests to additional markets abroad?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for his question. My ministry is here to promote trade with and attract investment to Alberta. Last year alone Alberta's international offices worked with more than 600 Alberta companies looking to

diversify and expand into new markets. I'll be working with my department to look at our current foreign offices with an eye to efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity. I also want to inform the House that last year alone Alberta exported \$121 billion; \$109 billion of that was to the United States. Therefore, we need to look at expanding into other markets much more robustly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation (continued)

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday over 1,500 farmers and ranchers took time to come to the Legislature and peacefully protest on the steps of this building. The government needs to recognize the anger and frustration that farmers and ranchers are feeling about the lack of consultation. Legislation before consultation or during consultation is ridiculous. Also, the moms and dads of small farms and ranches know more about safety on their land than any government can legislate. To the minister of agriculture: why don't you care about what farmers in this province are trying to tell you?

The Speaker: The minister of labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I was out at the rallies both on Friday and yesterday. Two ministers are there at the consultation today and all throughout the week. The consultation is very important to us, and we're listening, and obviously by saying that we're going to move forward and make explicit the amendment, that shows that we are. This is a good showing of working together.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that two ministers stood up in the House yesterday and provided vague answers, creating more uncertainty about consultation with farmers and ranchers, and noninformation from their government has left farmers and ranchers across this province just plain mad about the way that they're being treated and where safety has always been important on family farms and ranches, will the minister of labour acknowledge, as Rick Bell said, that "those in . . . government in charge of explaining things . . . well . . . they suck at it."

Ms Sigurdson: This bill, Mr. Speaker, has always been about safety on farms, and we want to work with the farming and ranching sector. This is about Kevan Chandler, who was killed in a farm accident, and his family, with three young children. His wife struggled with three jobs, and the farmer lost his land and his way of life because she had no recourse but to sue him. This is a disaster all across the board. We want to make sure that this never happens in Alberta again. Safety on farms and having compensation for people when they're hurt or injured is so important.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I am a farmer myself that manages 1,800 acres, doing all the work alone, and I understand the frustration that farmers and ranchers are feeling when I hear them say that their government isn't listening to them and that they want this legislation to go back to the drawing board, to the minister of agriculture. Based on your actions so far, this government is out of touch with Albertans. How can farmers and

ranchers of Alberta trust that you will be looking after their best interests when you bring in legislation that affects them without prior consultation?

Ms Sigurdson: I think we're demonstrating very clearly that we are listening. We have put forward an amendment. Sara, whom I spoke with, who was the organizer on Friday, said, "We want it in writing, Minister," so that's what we're doing. We're putting it up front. It was always our idea to do it in the 2017 regs, but we're bringing it up front because they asked us. I think that's listening, that's acting, and that's respecting.

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

Climate Change Strategy and First Nations

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has identified First Nations as a group that will feel significant impact from its climate change plan, and we know that First Nations are working hard to become active players in a resource sector that is already well established and difficult to break into. The government has talked about empowering First Nations to become more responsible for their energy efficiency and development and emissions and other resource activities. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: what are the specific details regarding the expected impact of climate change initiatives on First Nations communities, and what supports are you offering them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We heard loud and clear in our indigenous stakeholder engagement sessions through the climate panel process that, you know, the new economy that we are about to embark upon with respect to green energy development and green jobs ought not look like the old economy of social and economic exclusions for indigenous peoples. That's why the panel made some very robust recommendations with respect to adjustment for First Nations, with respect to investment in First Nations. We are considering how to best move forward on that, and we'll have more to say about it through the Budget '16 process.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you to the environment minister, but we'll try it a different way. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: given that on November 4 we discussed estimates for Aboriginal Relations and there was no special budget line allotment relating to climate change for First Nations and given that there was no discussion whatsoever on the shifting ground that the climate change initiative will have for First Nations, where will the funding assistance for First Nations come from in Budget 2015, and how much is allotted to it exactly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as the member knows, the changes that we are bringing forward via the climate change leadership plan will have an effect in 2017 as part of the budget 2016-17 deliberations. Therefore, we have been presented with a number of options by the panel, a number of which are very creative ways to ensure that we have indigenous participation in renewable energy and in ensuring adjustment and investment in First Nations communities as we move forward with our green economy initiatives. That's why we will see those items in Budget '16.

Mr. Rodney: The first two questions were directed to the Aboriginal Relations minister, and I'm sure that our First Nations friends would like to hear from her. We'll try for a third time. Obviously, you'll have to consult with First Nations to determine the impact of your climate change plan on their resource operations. Given that your government's record on consulting has received failing grades from many stakeholders – business with regard to the minimum wage increase, farmers with respect to farm worker legislation, and your own Premier just a few hours ago – how can Albertans have any confidence that you will consult with First Nations to ensure that they do receive the assistance they need to adapt to your climate change plan?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As I'm sure the member is aware, there has been extensive consultation already going forward with First Nations, not only through my ministry but through every ministry in government. This is because this new government is committed to building a new relationship with First Nations. We have valid, actual consultation, unlike the previous government.

Thank you very much.

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

Public School Boards' Association of Alberta

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To quote the Minister of Education from the *Calgary Herald*, "We want to ensure we're spending public dollars . . . in the classroom." While we applaud his comment, many are finding it hard to believe. It is still unclear whether or not the Public School Boards' Association is still intending to collect the special levy from school boards to stop Lakeland Catholic school board from opening a school in Lac La Biche. The last time I brought this up, I did not receive a definitive answer. Does the minister know if the PSBAA is collecting or still intends to collect the special levy?

2:20

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you for the question, and thanks, Mr. Speaker, for the reply. Certainly, we've been monitoring the circumstances very closely in the Lac La Biche area. Certainly, this government respects the right to Catholic education right across this province. I've sent a letter to the PSBAA as well as to the affected parties to make sure that they spend money in the classroom and not in litigation kitties.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's reassuring to hear that the minister is determined to ensure that school boards are properly spending his ministry's funds, but how can Albertans trust that he will do this? Given that Albertans want the ministry's money spent on education and not litigation and given that the PSBAA intends to pit school boards against each other in court, Minister, will you direct the PSBAA to either return the funds being collected from the school boards or redirect the spending of these funds so that they will be used to improve classroom experiences for our students?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, and thanks for the question. Certainly, you have to recognize that the PSBAA is an advocacy group that takes

funds from different school boards, so they run their operations independently. But that being said, certainly I have spoken to not just the public school boards in those areas but also to the Catholic ones to have a détente on these litigation procedures and get back to putting the money in the classroom.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister said, “These boards are accountable for their decisions, but I would just like them to reconsider this choice they are making,” – in the words of a famous politician, I would like to trust but verify – will the minister commit to tabling documents in this House to show that funds allocated to the PSBAA for this special levy are being clawed back until they decide to stop the pooling of such funds into a litigation fund, a fund that takes money away from the children of this province?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, once again let me make it clear that the PSBAA is an advocacy group unto itself, that we don’t have control over. However, certainly, I can put lots of messaging and very direct information to each of these boards to ensure that they back off from the litigation and get back to co-operating and building and operating schools in the best interests of our children here in the province.

Thank you.

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

Government Policies

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government seems very out of touch with farmers. There was no consultation with them on the impact of this carbon tax on their fertilizer costs, on their fuel costs, or on their soon to be skyrocketing electricity costs. The Premier affirmed this morning that this government will ram through Bill 6 this session. So much for consultation. The minister of jobs claims that she has heard from farmers. Has the minister heard the farmers shouting, “Kill Bill 6” at every rally in the province?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I just want to say that we have responded to the concerns presented, and we have addressed them through the amendments that we will give more details about very shortly. We’re continuing to consult. We have cabinet ministers at those consultations. It’s very important for us to hear, so we’re already listening.

Thank you.

Mr. MacIntyre: Given that this government has consistently failed to seek proper consultation in advance of drafting legislation and given that this government has consistently failed to assess the economic ripple effects of its policy proposals, did the government bother to assess the cost of implementing Bill 6, the carbon tax, the corporate tax increase, the locomotive tax increase upon Alberta’s farmers, its industries, and its citizens, and can the minister table these calculations?

The Speaker: The minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, during the climate change panel process we did have technical engagement sessions with those in Agriculture and Forestry, and as a result, when our government released our response to the panel recommendations, one of

the things we did was ensure that purple gas would be exempted from the carbon price. That’s just part of it. Certainly, we know there’s a tremendous amount of potential in our agricultural operations to ensure small-scale renewables, other waste-to-energy programs, which we’re examining to put together a regulatory framework so that we can make life better for farmers.

Mr. MacIntyre: Given that this government is obviously consultation challenged and given that we have yet to see any numbers necessary for a cost-benefit analysis of this coal phase-out, did this government bother consulting with the coal industry in advance of the coal phase-out acceleration regarding the plan’s price tag, and will the environment minister finally disclose to Albertans, who are on the hook for this bill, how many billions your plan is going to cost?

The Speaker: The minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Of course, we had a number of technical engagement sessions on the subject of the electricity system and the evolution of the system over time. Had the Official Opposition bothered to engage in the climate process at all, given that they were so busy denying the science of climate change . . .

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

Ms Phillips: . . . they would have read what the coal industry, the electricity industry, and others have said. Had they bothered to engage with this subject meaningfully, they would have seen the reaction to these plans from the electricity industry that we are moving forward.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Calgary Southwest Ring Road

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been working with the constituents of Calgary-West on the portion of the highway 8 corridor that is not on Tsuu T’ina land. The residents have superb suggestions that will save the province \$1 billion, but community groups are disappointed that their recommended cost savings have gone unheard since the NDP formed government. To the Transportation minister: given that the former government had been working well with the residents and given that since the NDP took over the project, the residents feel they have gone backwards, what is the current status of this project?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question. To the hon. member. The current status of the project is that a request for qualifications has been evaluated, consortia have been selected, and we are awaiting the issue of the tender for the work. I will remind the hon. member that according to the agreement that was negotiated by the previous government, there is a seven-year time frame for the completion of that ring road to the specifications set out in the agreement with the Tsuu T’ina people. If we fail to complete it in seven years, the land, the highway, and everything else reverts to the nation. We want to make sure that that does not happen.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That’s why I said: not on Tsuu T’ina land.

Again to the same minister: given that the residents of Discovery Ridge and Springbank Hill offered your government excellent

recommendations that could save taxpayers, again, \$1 billion and given that the city of Calgary has confirmed the savings that would result from these recommendations, why are you insisting on building a future 16-lane highway when we can reduce the bridge deck sizes now and save Albertans \$1 billion?

Mr. Mason: Again, Mr. Speaker, according to the agreement previously negotiated by that member's government and by that member's leader when he was the minister, we have seven years to complete the road according to the criteria and the scope that are set out in the agreement. We are not going to delay that. The risk to the people of Alberta is simply too great, far greater than \$1 billion.

Mr. Ellis: Again, I'm not referring to Tsuu T'ina land.

Given that the Transportation minister has been an MLA for 15 years and given that when he was in opposition, he criticized ministers for not consulting, but now that he's in government, he won't meet with the residents in my constituency – the people of Calgary-West are deeply disappointed with the government as a result of that – will the minister commit today to meet with the residents of Calgary-West and review the cost-saving measures for this ring road?

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated to the hon. member, the project is about to be tendered, and there is a clock that is ticking. However, if the hon. member feels so strongly about meeting with his constituents, then I'm happy to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

2:30 Aboriginal Workforce Participation

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've worked in Alberta for over 40 years, both as a teacher and an educational psychologist, and I've spent a significant amount of my life working closely with students from the First Nations, Métis, and other indigenous communities in Alberta. I'd like to see more opportunities for young people from these communities to find and keep employment; hence, I was very pleased to see an increase in the budget for employment and career development. To the hon. Minister of Human Services: how will this budget increase support for our aboriginal working-age population?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, member, for the question. Our government was elected on a campaign promise to work with our indigenous communities as partners. Budget 2015 includes increased funding to support Albertans who need assistance to re-enter and enter the workforce, including our indigenous community members. These programs range from training for work programs like the aboriginal training to employment program and career development services. The outcomes of these programs are greater opportunities, enhanced skills, and sustained employment for all Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. I'd like to ask the hon. minister if he can share with us any statistics of working-age aboriginal people living off-reserve in Alberta. Also, what per cent of the total workforce is comprised of indigenous people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. The number of indigenous people living off-reserve in September 2015 was 152,000. Of these, 94,700 are employed, which represents 4.1 per cent of Alberta's overall employment. Of those employed, 82,800 were employed full-time and 11,900 were employed part-time.

In 2013 roughly 10,200 were enrolled in postsecondary schools.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that 4.1 per cent of Alberta's overall workforce is comprised of aboriginal people, I'd like to ask the same minister: what is this government doing to ensure their long-term employment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government campaigned and was elected on a promise to renew the partnership, renew our relationship with First Nations, and we intend to keep that promise. That is the reason that we are scanning our programs and services delivered to indigenous communities in consultation with indigenous communities, led by the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, to make sure that those services are delivered in a culturally appropriate manner.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Sheep River Nurse Practitioners Clinic

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On July 29 – mark that date: July 29 – I wrote the Health minister about the lack of a funding model for the Sheep River nurse practitioner clinic in Okotoks. The minister said to me: I don't have time to meet with you; go through your shadow minister. Okay. So on November 19 the shadow minister at my request asked about this, to which the minister said: it's the first time I've heard of it. Minister, this clinic is in the process of shutting down because you've ignored your duties. Are you finally ready to work with these front-line workers to establish a funding model that works? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've prided myself on reaching out to my colleagues across the floor and to my critics to make sure that we have an opportunity to bring items of mutual concern forward in a comprehensive way to actually work through some of the challenges. It was brought forward in question period. I did not recall the letter until this moment, when I was reminded. It might not surprise you that I do receive a significant amount of correspondence. I'm really happy to work with the member to have a greater understanding of some of the challenges there. Of course, we want to make sure that Albertans get the right care in the right place at the right time by the right health professional.

Mr. W. Anderson: Words are good, but we need some firm timelines, Minister. She's already kicked the can down the road twice, and now this facility is closing, and the 1,800 people it serves are facing the lack of critical health care services. Given that we've repeatedly reached out to the minister and considering time is of the essence, is the minister prepared to do what she hasn't and sit down with the Sheep River nurse practitioners to find a solution today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. If he passes a phone number to me, I'll be happy to find the time to call them. My schedule is very busy, but I will make sure I don't go to bed until I reach out to them personally if he will be so kind as to send the number.

Mr. W. Anderson: Airdrie, Wainwright, now Okotoks. This minister is cutting front-line health care services across rural Alberta, and she's about to close this facility, as was outlined in a letter to her from the nurse practitioners on October 21. Given that this makes three times now that I've asked the minister to sit down and do her job and considering she's not ready to commit, can the minister explain to the people of Okotoks why she ignored them for six months?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I've said that I'll make the phone call. I'm committed to making the phone call. We've actually increased funding to health care as opposed to what members opposite are proposing, which is to cut billions of dollars from the overall budget. I find the irony of the fact that people who spend their days telling us how bad we are for spending on essential front-line services like health care and at the same time are criticizing us for doing so astounding. But I personally will reach out to the affected parties should the member follow up with a phone number today.

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. Fraser: Albertans care deeply about the environment, and as Albertans we also understand the importance of our actions and the potential outcomes on all levels. Mr. Speaker, the government needs to be keenly aware that their actions have real impacts, and that's why real consultations are so important, so I urge the government respectfully to stop talking and start listening. To the minister of environment. The coal-fired electricity generation industry has told us that many of their facilities will have to close before the 2030 date, with the onset of the government's carbon tax. This will drive energy costs well above the expected 20 per cent hike. Minister, how will you ensure grid stability when these facilities shut down early?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question and for his ongoing, I believe, respectful and genuine engagement on environmental files. I applaud it. On this matter of the transition and evolution of our electricity system we've made it very clear that, of course, under the previous government's timelines and the previous federal government's timelines, for that matter, 12 of the 18 plants that are currently coal-fired emissions plants would be coming offline by 2030 anyway, leaving the six. We have engaged in a process with the operators of the remaining six plants. We will be appointing a negotiator in order to make sure that we are doing this in a way that's fair for workers, companies, and communities.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fraser: Given that Alberta does have an abundant supply of wind and solar possibilities and given that it's very clear that these sources will play an integral role in ensuring reliability, maximizing efficiency, and accommodating long-term growth and given that new transmission lines will have to be built through southern

Alberta to distribute the power from the source to where it's needed, to the same minister: how many transmission lines will have to be built, and how much land will have to be ceded to the government, and can you tell rural landowners what the consultation process will look like?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, we have been in constant contact and consultation with transmission generators and others as we move forward with this plan. Of course, this is a long-term horizon planning item that we have undertaken as part of our government's commitment to climate leadership, and we have heard already from transmission companies and others that have said that this is a golden opportunity for Alberta. We have some of the finest wind and solar and other resources in North America, and we know from the systems operator that this will be done in a careful, cautious, and thoughtful manner.

2:40

Mr. Fraser: To the same minister: given that the climate change framework has a strong emphasis on methane emissions and given that you have previously stated that you will look to work with the agricultural sector to address "certain inputs, certain outputs," what would be the total average burden placed on Alberta farming families when you add together the increase in personal income tax, the fuel tax, the carbon tax, the other effects of the climate change plan, and compliance with the spectrum of proposed changes in the farm workplace regulations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, our methane policies have to do with the oil and gas sector. Those were a very robust consultation process between industry, government, and environment groups, and we're very proud of those recommendations that we accepted.

Now, on this matter of agriculture we did undertake a number of technical engagement sessions with the agricultural industries. We will work with them on frameworks in order to ensure that we can give opportunities for small-scale renewables, for geothermal, for other microgeneration possibilities, Mr. Speaker, so that all Albertans can enjoy the benefits of a green economy.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Government Policies

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, Albertans just can't trust this NDP government. See, when the NDP was elected six months ago, they promised to do things differently. They said that they'd be honest with Albertans, but the broken promises continue to pile up. Take, for example, their promise to deliver a balanced budget by 2019. That didn't last long. Then there was their promise to release a full infrastructure sunshine report. Say goodbye to that, too. Then they said that they would consult with Albertans. That might make sense given that their leader spent a lifetime in opposition talking about the importance of consultation, but that quickly went the way of the dodo.

As well, they instead made announcement after announcement without any consultation with their key stakeholders or local officials involved. I would point to their decisions in the Castle area, Springbank, and most recently their decision to impose the most

heavy-handed agricultural legislation in provincial history without having consulted with farmers or ranchers, a decision, by the way, that they never campaigned on.

They promised to operate a government that was respectful of the public purse, but that didn't stop them from almost immediately ramping up spending and plunging Alberta deep into record debt and record deficit. Now they're killing the economy with their royalty review, business taxes, and most recently their backdoor PST, also known as a carbon tax, which, once again, they never campaigned on.

They promised to be open with Albertans, but look who's behind the curtain: radical activists, anti-oil crusaders, political mercenaries. Look at the damage that they've done in just a few months: tax increases, job losses, and ideological experiments that have caused unprecedented levels of unemployment. The NDP ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Was there anything else that you wanted to add, hon. member?

Mr. Stier: There certainly is, Mr. Speaker, if I may continue.

The Speaker: You have 10 seconds left.

Mr. Stier: Ten? I'm sorry, sir. That's not possible.

Family Farms

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about Alberta family farms. Growing up on a farm, I learned a lot of lessons about life that I carry with me and still use today. When I was a kid, I was involved in 4-H. When I was 12, I chaired my first 4-H meeting. In the cities there are lots of activities for kids to get involved in like hockey, dance, karate, et cetera, but for me and many farm kids like me it was 4-H.

In 4-H you learn about farm safety and how to safely deal with animals. The 4-H motto is Learn to Do by Doing, so you are prepared for the unexpected and you have tools for how to deal with complicated situations with animals. These were things you relied on in all aspects of your life around the farm. If you took a tour of the farm on a quad and you happened by a cow that had gotten herself in trouble, you knew that you could help her because you were taught by your parents and your grandparents or you learned it in 4-H.

Farming, Mr. Speaker, is so much more than a geographic location or means of income for your family. It is a lifestyle, and this lifestyle, a great one, I might add, does not break down into specific compartments. Life on a farm is constantly mingling chores, extracurricular activity, and family life all the time. Whether you're dealing with your 4-H steer in the barn or a farm steer, you handle the animal with the same care and diligence because you were taught that way. There's no separation of states in farm life. You're a farm kid, and I would hate to see that lost.

I am proud to have grown up on a farm, just like so many of my constituents who grew up and continue raising their families on their own. I will continue to work as the MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti to advocate for the family farms of Alberta and ensure that this government is taking the right steps to act in their best interests and not against them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta Bottle Depot Association

Mr. Kleinstuber: Mr. Speaker, on the 24th of October I had the opportunity to visit Banff and deliver a speech at the annual industry

conference hosted by the Alberta Bottle Depot Association. I have always been an active recycler wherever possible, so it was an event that I was happy to attend. Each year depot owners and stakeholders gather together in an effort to collaborate, educate, and recognize excellence within the industry.

The container return and recycle system in Alberta is an environmental, social, and economic success story. I learned that last year alone 216 bottle depots within the province were able to gather close to 2.1 billion beverage containers, achieving an 83.3 per cent return rate. Because Albertans chose to recycle their bottles and cans through the depot system, it meant that more than 129,000 tonnes of waste was diverted from landfills, and this waste was repurposed into other useful products that benefit society. Mr. Speaker, every incremental tonne of beverage containers recovered has a significant environmental impact, reducing GHG emissions by at least 4.1 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent.

In addition, this program allows community groups to raise funds through bottle drives, and it gives the disadvantaged a way to gain some income through recycling. The program also has the effect of benefiting the Alberta cans for kids initiative and the Ronald McDonald House through generous donations from within the industry. Ronald McDonald House received around \$80,000 in donations that evening.

Demonstrating environmental stewardship and protecting our natural resources by reducing the amount of bottles and cans that end up in landfills is important to Albertans, and I am grateful that this system is in place. I would like to thank the minister of environment for the opportunity to attend the event. It was pleasure to meet many of the bottle depot owners and industry partners that make this a world-class system.

Thank you.

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Speaker, our government is taking strong leadership on climate change, and I would like to provide for the record quotes from industry representatives. Many representatives from the energy sector have spoken loudly and clearly in favour of Alberta's climate leadership plan, and here are some of the quotes.

First, Steve Williams, CEO of Suncor: when we look back, we will see this day will be a historic day, certainly, for oil sands, I think for all of Alberta and for all of Canada; we think this is the moment for us to get back into the position of being a leader, particularly around environment performance; today is a real demonstration we are willing to take action, move from just conversation.

Also, the president of Shell Canada, Lorraine Mitchelmore, said:

It's rare to see energy companies and environmentalists find cause to agree ... the government of Alberta gave us reason not only to agree, but to stand together and applaud ... I firmly believe that Alberta's climate plan is a win for both the economy and the environment. It will position Alberta, and by extension Canada, to be a global leader in combatting climate change. It will also promote economic prosperity for future generations by focusing on jobs and diversification and by ensuring that the cost burden of the carbon price is eased for the most vulnerable Albertans.

TransAlta president Dawn Farrell called the strategy "a positive, timely and important step forward." TransCanada president Russ Girling said that he also supported this plan.

2:50

The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers said in a statement that it agreed with Notley and expected changes proposed by the panel "to further enhance the reputation of our sector and

improve our province's environmental credibility as we seek to expand market access nationally and internationally."

These quotes are just some of the many from industry that support Alberta's climate change leadership.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Family Farms

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very thankful to call central Alberta home. I draw your attention today to the central Alberta economic region, not just one riding but many. It's a region of 41 municipal governments of the top region by GDP in all of North America. This area has a long history of prosperity and continues to be a driver of our province's economic development. The manufacturing, oil and gas, petrochemicals, logistics, agriculture-agrifood sectors are the big five key industries. Central Alberta is Canada's largest producer of cattle, hogs, poultry, and barley. Our fertile soil and favourable climate make central Alberta a thriving centre for agriculture. This central region has the largest amount of farmland in Alberta, at 3.8 million acres, truly placing it at the core of the province's thriving agri-industry.

The natural assets of this region have made it one of the great places in the world. But our area isn't successful just because of the land. It's successful because of the people who work the land. Through generations of farmers and ranchers they have perfected their craft and passed down their knowledge to their children. The greatest farm product of central Alberta is not wheat or livestock. It's progeny, the children who become the leading young men and women of our future who grow up strong and free, broadly knowledgeable and experienced. There is no better or safer place to grow up than on an Alberta farm. Children who ride seeders with their moms and dads, children who learn to bottle-feed calves with their grandparents, the young man from Innisfail who at 12 just bought six preg-checked heifers this fall: they learn from experience. There is no teacher like it.

It takes a lifetime to learn the skills which are needed to keep our province's agriculture sector the strongest in the world. I urge this government: please keep the family in family farms. They are vital to their education and the future of our province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Ms Miller: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Section 15(2) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act I am pleased to table the 2015-2016 second quarter report on the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. The report has been distributed.

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition from Calgarians who want the provincial government to amend the Health Act to include an independent seniors' advocate.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Hoffman, Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Combined Laboratory and X-Ray Technologists 2014 annual

report, the College of Dental Technologists of Alberta 2014 annual report, the College of Alberta Denturists annual report 2014, the College of Alberta Psychologists annual report 2014-15, the College of Naturopathic Doctors of Alberta annual report 2014, and the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta annual report 2015.

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table these letters from my constituents regarding concerns with Bill 6. I have the correct number of copies.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I believe there was a point of order raised by the House leader for the Official Opposition.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to a point of order in question period. I am specifically speaking to Standing Order 23(j): "insulting language ... likely to create disorder." During question period the hon. Minister of Status of Women along with some other responsibilities that she has rose and was answering a question that had been posed by the opposition. In her reply she made a number of statements that created disorder in the House.

I know that we have seen a lot of misinformation being spread by the government. In fact, Mr. Speaker, just yesterday in this House there was an apology by an hon. minister for spreading misinformation. So for the minister to make claims that members of this caucus are climate change deniers and don't believe in science, while the government members may like to continue the spread of this misinformation from the backbenches, at no point in time, certainly to the best of my knowledge, did any member of this new caucus make any claims that would allow such a statement, that is not close to the truth, to be made in this Assembly.

If the minister is serious, she can rise and apologize for the misinformation that she's spreading and the type of language that continues to create disorder on this side of the House. I'm certain that disorder would cease if the government would stop spreading misinformation and untruths about this caucus.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, with respect to this point of order I can only suggest that it is simply a disagreement between members as to a set of facts. It is the opinion of many on this side of the House that, in fact, the Official Opposition, the Wildrose Party in particular, has had a long history of denying climate change and, in fact, it was a key factor in determining the outcome of the 2012 election.

We have subsequently seen that the Wildrose has continued to oppose climate change proposals, reasonable ones that are supported by a wide range of Albertans, including oil sands producers, First Nations, and responsible environmental groups. We heard the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod in his member's statement just today attempt to ascribe those kinds of policies to just listening to a certain bunch of radical environmentalists. That was my recollection of what he said. You know, in

fact, even today in question period the Leader of the Official Opposition referenced a Fraser Institute report authored by a known climate change denier, Kenneth Green, who has said in the past, “We can expect the climate crisis industry to grow increasingly shrill, and increasingly hostile toward anyone who questions their authority.”

Mr. Speaker, there’s lots of evidence not to prove or demonstrate conclusively that everyone in the Wildrose Party is a climate change denier but to say that there’s a very strong element within that party that actually is . . .

3:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. I didn’t hear any new information that you were providing to help make the decision.

Mr. Mason: I’m sorry, Mr. Speaker. I’m merely saying that the minister spoke the truth.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you’re certainly well aware, this House relies on decisions of past Speakers, and it relies on precedent in order to make decisions that are then consistent and carry us forward.

Now, I consider myself privileged to have been here in the last Legislature when the ruling of Speaker Zwodzesky came down. It was a very interesting day. It’s one that I’ll never forget because it was, in fact, the day that the predecessor to the current Official Opposition House Leader, while he was still a member of that party – sometimes it was hard to keep track of which side of the House he was on – and while he was over on this side, stated unequivocally that the Official Opposition agreed that climate change was real and that it, in fact, had a man-made component to it. He stated that, and he stated that that was the official position of the Official Opposition, which prompted, actually, calls as to how they felt about the whole round/flat Earth thing. Indeed, it did also prompt the Government House Leader at the time, the previous Premier of our province also, to point out that he had just seen the lake of fire freeze over.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, the sum total of the discussion was that the term “climate change denier” was decided by Speaker Zwodzesky to be a term that should be avoided in this House, especially when referring to the Official Opposition. That may be the opinion of some hon. members on the government side, and we recognize that those members were not necessarily here during the last Legislature, but I think it is fair to say that using the term “climate change denier,” because it could also be linked to the denial of another event that happened in the 20th century, is, I would consider, a great insult. Because of that, the ruling of Speaker Zwodzesky at the time was that the term “climate change denier” should preferably be avoided by members of the House.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I would recommend to you that in ruling on this particular point of order, you simply caution members in the future to avoid this particular term because indeed it is a term that, while it is a matter of debate, can incite disorder within the House and therefore would be a violation of Standing Order 23(j).

The Speaker: Are there any other parties or members who would like to speak to the point of order?

Hon. members, when hearing the arguments, I thought this was a fairly reasonably straightforward matter, but on my cautionary approach to this new job I will take the opportunity once again to consider the arguments on both sides and report back. I recognize that I was not, for example, familiar with the previous Speaker’s ruling. Nonetheless, I will report back at a future time.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Adjournment of Fall Session

14. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2015 fall sitting be extended beyond the first Thursday in December until such time as or when the Government House Leader advises the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded, and at such time the Assembly stands adjourned.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 8

Public Education Collective Bargaining Act

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I’m very pleased to be here today to introduce the second reading of Bill 8, the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act.

Since its introduction in the House last Thursday we’ve been having ongoing discussions with key partners about this legislation as well as discussions and interaction for many, many months. Our conversations have been very positive and constructive, and I have several more scheduled for the days ahead, in fact, subsequent technical briefings and so forth over the next three or four days.

We’ve been hearing much positive feedback around this and some concerns as well among school boards, so certainly we’ve been working hard to help everyone understand exactly what we’re doing. The role in determining what items might be bargained provincially, of course, is one item that people are concerned about, and we’re working to provide more information about the new teachers’ bargaining association and the fundamental role that school boards will play in this body. Boards will have a further opportunity to provide feedback in the coming days as well, and we’re actively sharing more details with them about this process.

Schools and teachers are a pillar of our community, Mr. Speaker, and they are a priority for this government. This bill will give the government, as education’s funder, a seat at the bargaining table, which is something that all parties involved understand the essential need for. I want to stress that this legislation focuses on how we bargain and not what we’re bargaining on, so this is an important thing to keep in mind as we work through Bill 8 here. Conversations about which items will be negotiated at each table will continue through the coming weeks and months.

During this past fall officials with my department consulted with every one of this province’s 61 school boards about the bargaining processes of the past and how we can move forward in a collaborative manner. The feedback from this consultation was very, very positive, as were my subsequent meetings with each of the 61 school boards in the fall and summer as well. Mr. Speaker, the conversation is just beginning. We know that our teachers and school board representatives alike work tirelessly to support our students and provide them with a world-class education, that they deserve. This bill marks a very positive first step to forging a collaborative relationship between all parties involved.

Mr. Speaker, I support the passing of this bill so that Alberta’s bargaining process can proceed in a fair and effective manner and so that we have the best control over our scarce public resources, to

ensure that we continue on delivering really one of the best education systems across North America and throughout the world. This will allow us to continue focusing on our task, which is to shepherd our students through their K to 12 education, and I certainly encourage all members here today to speak fully on this, have a fulsome debate, and then help us pass this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any hon. members who wish to speak to Bill 8? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Merci, M. le Président. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise here today with the Minister of Education and my colleague the Member for Calgary-Shaw to move the second reading of Bill 8, the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act. We all know how critical it is to provide a quality education to our students because, above all, students are the future of our province.

I personally served as a school trustee in British Columbia for nine years, including a term as board chair, so I know that the focus of school trustees is on the students and their needs, and they do so by focusing their resources in the classroom. I also know that teachers, just like school trustees, are focused on creating great classrooms for their students and their students' achievements. I should also include that the support staff in our schools are also focused on ensuring that the students have great achievements.

3:10

School boards also reflect the values of their local community, and it's really important that we respect the roles that school boards have in reflecting the values of their local community. I believe that the establishment of the teachers' employer bargaining association, as mentioned in the bill, will allow all school boards to have a voice at the provincial table. I understand that the exact structure of that organization will be determined in collaboration with our partners. The hon. Minister of Education has been very clear that he respects the roles and responsibilities of elected trustees, and I know that he will take their input on the bargaining process very seriously. I have had the pleasure of meeting many existing school trustees in Alberta, and I know that they are dedicated to ensuring the best for their students in their school district.

We also as government must be in a good position to meet our obligations of balancing the budget and ensuring fiscal stability in the province as best we can. Bill 8 removes questions about the roles and processes for all parties and provides a framework by which all of these parties can participate in the collective bargaining process, including government.

Mr. Speaker, I firmly support this bill, and I do believe that it will be in the best interests of all parties to have it passed. Thank you.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for allowing me to elaborate on the words of my colleagues in support of Bill 8, the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act. As I have said before in this House, I am a father of three young children, who will be attending school in Alberta for the next two decades. As such, quality education is a cause near and dear to my heart. Having had family who have been involved in public education, I have a strong interest in the matter. Since being elected, I have visited schools, met local trustees, and met members of some of the 61 school boards in Alberta. I have learned how some share similar concerns and how some have issues that are completely different from one another. That is why I stand here in full support of Bill 8, because I believe that putting a framework in place that allows multiple boards to find a fair, cost-effective way to negotiate a collective

bargaining agreement is the right choice for our province, our taxpayers, and our children.

This important legislation will implement a two-table system that allows for significant monetary items to be negotiated provincially while allowing boards to retain autonomy and direct input on matters of local concern. These local matters can involve, for example, travel allowances for substitute teachers or stipends for sports team coaches.

For the first round of bargaining, which must begin before the current collective agreement ends in August of the next year, government will sit down with partners, including the province's 61 school boards, to identify and discuss which items will be negotiated at the central table and which ones will belong to the local board.

This process, Mr. Speaker, will allow all boards to have inputs on bargaining matters. Many people believe that this could divert a possible strike, which could be hard on single parents and households that require both parents to work. Major organizations, including the Alberta Teachers' Association and ASBA, have advocated for a two-table approach for many years. Just last year the president of the ATA reiterated his organization's belief that it is important to have the funders at the bargaining table.

I am proud of the work we are doing to establish a fair and effective bargaining process for all parties. For the sake of our children's education I urge all colleagues on both sides of the House to join in support of this bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) for the hon. member?

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, once again we're seeing a bill introduced on a Thursday and attempting to be jammed through this House within just a few days without appropriate consultation. I have heard from school boards in my riding, and they are asking us to do what we can to actually slow this bill down. They're not telling us whether they're for it or against it. The issue that they have is that the only consultation they received was, quote, a three-minute conference call with the minister. That is not consultation.

Mr. Eggen: That's not true.

Mr. MacIntyre: That's what we were told.

Now, if you're going to have consultation, you're going to need to give the school boards an opportunity to gather together to deliberate over this bill and all of the parts within it and to have time to consider this. Frankly, this time of year, being the Christmas season, it's not exactly something that is necessarily easy to do. It would be, in my opinion, significantly better if this government would slow down. Take your time. Give the school boards an opportunity to deliberate appropriately over this thing. There is no rush. You know, why not wait until the spring session to put this thing through the House? Give the school boards the time they need to properly deliberate and time to get back to the minister with what their deliberations come to.

This government is failing to consult appropriately with key stakeholders on legislation after legislation after legislation. It is a consistent pattern that is alarming. We're not seeing bills going to committee for proper consultation with stakeholders. It's just: ram it on through here. They use their majority to simply bulldoze bills through this Legislature without taking the appropriate measures to make use of the parliamentary system that is in place like standing

committees, like proper stakeholder involvement. Instead, it's just pushing stuff through this House.

We're hearing, as I said, from school boards saying: please do what you can to, quote, slow this government down. That ought not be something that school boards have to ask the Official Opposition to do. Come on. This is silliness. I would ask the government to please consider these concerns from school boards, that are legitimate. Slow down. Listen to what they're saying. Give them an opportunity to appropriately look at this bill and the implications of this bill on their individual school boards, get back to the ministry with their input, and then let the ministry develop legislation.

What we're seeing, Mr. Speaker, is that they're legislating first and consulting second. That's not genuine. That is not genuine consultation. That is just being almost dictatorial. It's really shameful. I would ask the government to reconsider their actions, to properly consult with these school boards, and let's come up with a really good bill that is maybe developed by the school boards for the school boards. It kind of sounds like a democratic thing to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments for the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Mason: With respect, hon. member, the bill is not by school boards for school boards. The bill sets in place a framework for negotiations between the government and the Alberta Teachers' Association and between school boards and the Alberta Teachers' Association locals. That's what it does. To let the school boards write the legislation would not make any sense.

Mr. MacIntyre: While that may be true, Mr. Speaker, in having the involvement of the school boards, who are the ones given the responsibility for our children's education, who are given the responsibility for schools in this province, they should be having some serious consultation with the minister over the content of this bill, and that is simply not happening. My point is: consult first; legislate second. That's the right way around.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other comments for the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

3:20

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister stated today, and I quote: conversations with each of the 61 school boards have been very constructive and positive. Perhaps he has had conversations like that. I can't help but wonder if there are other conversations than the conversation we're having today, and here's why. I say this with great respect, and I think that you know this, Minister. I have heard the opposite comment from those who represent trustees provincially. They've told me that they have not had a chance to discuss the bill with the minister or Alberta Education. The minister's call to the board chairs, which occurred on Friday, November 27, did not allow for questions to be asked, and the boards had not had an opportunity to review the bill prior to it being introduced.

We could throw in a number of clichés here, but I don't feel the need to do that. I think the minister gets the point. There seems to be a huge gap between the input that the school boards indicated they provided to Alberta Education and the comments the minister is making suggesting that this bill reflects the input and wishes of the school boards, a product of having missed a step in the

minister's consultation process where input could have been validated with school boards and the related decisions explained.

School boards need an opportunity to meet with the minister or Alberta Education staff to understand the proposed legislation and how it advances the interests of school boards and how school boards are going to be engaged in the process moving forward. I would think it's just common sense that school boards need to have the chance to raise any concerns they have now as the matter may be concluded in this Legislature before they've had a chance to speak to the minister or Alberta Education.

I just see such an inconsistency from when they sat over here – and I heard them very loud and clear – talking about the importance of consultation. Many times when we were sitting over there, we were accused of consulting too much. There's got to be a happy medium here, and that is not what we're enjoying at this moment. There is a serious gap. I can't help but wonder what the minister is going to do with yet another significant consultation issue.

It's in your hands, Minister. Please do the right thing.

The Speaker: Are there any questions for the Member for Calgary-Lougheed under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Eggen: Well, certainly, I will frame the question in the broadest possible way. I just wanted to address, actually, the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake as well as yourself. Certainly, from the time that I assumed the role of Minister of Education, this was a very important part of what we wanted to work through with all of the parties that are involved. It's very important, again, to remind oneself that this is about how the framework of negotiation will take place. It's quite straightforward. From the beginning I made sure that not only I myself was touring each of the 61 school boards to have meetings with them in regard to this issue but also my senior staff that was working on the legislation and on the negotiations as well, so two layers of consultation on this issue and others over a period of many months.

Now, when you have the legislation itself, of course, you have some consultation, but is it not also very important to know that you don't hand out the legislation before you do so? It was made pretty much explicit what was in the contents of this before, as we went through the process, and then, of course, last week we had the representation from the Alberta Teachers' Association in one room here and a technical briefing for all of the members here in the opposition and with the School Boards Association as well. Now, the legislation is out, and then we go through a legislative process by which we debate the merits of the bill and also work through with each of the school boards over the next three days or four days how those technical things happen as well.

I mean, this is certainly very reasonable. I would think, to frame this into a question: isn't it about how we use not just the legislative process but, through layers of interaction over quite a long period of time, that we come up with the most reasonable solution? We're not trying to pull the wool over anybody's eyes on this. It's a framework which we can use, that people understand, and that was arrived at over a period of at least six months.

Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: I didn't quite hear a question in that, but that's the point. Our trustees, who are charged with these responsibilities, on Friday were informed of what was to come, to be debated, in the minister's words, in a few days. They weren't allowed to ask questions. I'm sure that over the months – I don't doubt the minister – he had good conversations but not specifically about this. It's one thing to not necessarily take this side of the House at their word, but these are the words of the people who are running our school boards

and who voted to do exactly that. I would hope that the words, that I will not read into *Hansard*, would be heard loud and clear. I've heard so many times from members all over this House: slow down, do it right the first time, consult, and then legislate. It's just a word to the wise. That's all.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member made a comment that we've been accused of consulting too much. I heard the Government House Leader, though he didn't have the floor, say: and that never happened. I would say to the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed on Bill 6: when our government spent a long time talking to farmers and ranchers, while we didn't think we were quite finished yet, which is why we hadn't brought forward legislation, would you not agree that we had been accused of consulting too much? There's one shining example of that.

Mr. Rodney: There's no question about that, and there are others. I'm not necessarily proud of that other than the fact that we definitely strove to get it right. You look at the social policy framework as just yet another example. I was so proud of the wellness framework, the only one of its kind in North America. It's being copied all over the world right now.

I think that's the point. We're not opposed to a lot of the intent of many of these pieces of legislation, but we're saying that to ram it through before Christmas, in a matter of days and, I might add, nights and mornings, is nonsensical. I just urge caution. I urge us to slow down and get it right.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I just read again the point that was raised, again for your edification as well as my own. Standing Order 29(2)(a) – and I'm abbreviating it – reads:

To allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each Member's questions and comments.

I would remind all of the members, on both sides of the House, to maybe read that again in terms of their comments when time is used under 29(2)(a).

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today on Bill 8. I, too, will be echoing some of the concerns from folks on this side of the House about the direction that we're going on Bill 8. But before I do that, let me just say thank you to the minister. I know that he had a very busy summer getting around and meeting with lots of school boards and getting feedback on a wide variety of issues, and some of those issues are certainly addressed in this bill.

I don't believe that the comments we're hearing today are specific to the lack of consultation that took place in the summer, that included a wide swath of issues affecting the department, but more so the process and the rollout of the conclusion of those consultations. There are many steps that take place in the process of consultation. One of them is gathering information, providing feedback, thoughtful reflection, and then delivery of that, delivery of the results of that consultation. I think one of the real big frustrations – and I know that I had the opportunity to meet with one of the school boards that is in the area of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. They highlighted a number of frustrations for me and asked if I on their behalf could try and let the minister know some of their concerns and frustrations, and they are that while the consultation process certainly took place this summer, at no point in time did they receive any feedback of what the results of those consultations were.

3:30

Then on Thursday, when the bill was introduced, they were quite surprised by a bunch of the content in that bill, particularly in light of the fact that a lot of the consultations were around “what method of two-table negotiations would you like?” Not “are the two-table negotiations the only and the best way?” but “if you had to choose between these two types of two-table consultations or bargaining, which one of these would you like, and how can we make it work?” To say that there was consultation – certainly, consultation did happen, but it wasn't an opportunity to provide all feedback but more about: “This looks like the path forward. How do you feel about that?”

Then, also, this frustration and disappointment around not receiving any sort of feedback on the consultation so that they would have a sense of the path forward: I know that that certainly was an issue for this particular school division. In fact, what they've done is that they have identified for us a number of potential risks and challenges. I might just say that today I hope that we don't get through second reading because I'm just not a hundred per cent sure where I even fall on the bill. They've highlighted a number of concerns within the bill, and it would be great to have a little bit more time to be able to discuss with them as they continue to analyze and get more feedback from other members and other associations across the province.

They've highlighted just a couple of issues that I think are worth bringing to light today, particularly when it comes to TEBA not having a seat at the initial bargaining table to determine such critical aspects of the path forward, and that's predominantly around this discussion that will take place around what is local and what is provincial. The bill recognizes the importance of TEBA in future negotiations but not this first one. TEBA is the organization that's predominantly or solely the voice of school board trustees at the negotiating table, Mr. Speaker, so it naturally creates a sense of concern that the ministry and the ATA are going to do all of the decision-making when it comes to what TEBA gets to have input on and what they don't have input on, but they don't have a voice about what those things will be. It's a major, major, major concern for them.

The other concern that I know I've heard, not specifically from this school board that met with me this morning but from many others: some concerns around the vagueness in the legislation when it comes to who the minister will be able to appoint onto TEBA and who they might not. It doesn't give any parameters on exactly the groups of folks that he might appoint.

[Mr. Feehan in the chair]

You know, naturally there's some concern or risk that not this minister, sir – not this minister – but a future minister might take this opportunity to utilize this vagueness in the legislation for a political purpose, not one that is solely in the best interest of TEBA itself or in the ATA or perhaps even the department or Albertans but that it might be just a bit of a kickback for a friend or a political opponent or whatever reason that they might.

Let me be clear. I don't believe, not even a little bit, that this minister would ever have that intention, but the problem is that when we pass legislation in this place, it's not only for today, but it's also for tomorrow. We need to have pause and caution when we set out the course of the future, particularly around something so important as collective bargaining. You know, this next bargaining arrangement and agreement is going to be very significant for not only the public purse but also for the health and well-being of our teachers and how they engage in our classrooms. What we're doing is quite important.

So it's very, very concerning that school boards are saying: ah, we appreciate the chat in the summer; we appreciate the three-minute shout-out that this is what's going to happen on Friday – maybe “appreciate” is a bit of stretch there because I've received a little bit more feedback on that, that there was some significant frustration around that being a come-and-be-told conference call event, not a consultation event. But we will set that aside for now. There is this frustration about: now we consulted in the summer, but we are going to move forward at breakneck speed in the passing of this legislation.

I know one school board in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the one that I spoke about prior, and I asked them about sharing some of this information. Certainly, they said that that would be fine. They have released a couple of public documents with concerns, and I'll just briefly mention some of those concerns from the document. I'm more than happy to table the document in the House tomorrow. We understand that there is consideration for second reading and third reading to be completed and the passage of this legislation into law before the currently scheduled December 3 end of sitting. Now, we did extend that today, so it's possible that it won't be quite as quick as the 3rd, but it's very reasonable to think that if this government doesn't slow the bill down and if members of the government don't rise to prolong the debate, by the end of the week this could in fact be law. These folks have concerns about that.

They go onto say that we have not seen this legislation prior to November 25, which in accordance to the practices of the House would have been a breach of privilege, and they were unable to see the bill. My guess, Mr. Speaker, is that this government knew probably sometime around the 26th of October, when we all got back to this place, that this bill was coming, so it could have been put on the Order Paper on the 28th of October or the 26th, early in the session, and allowed for this conversation to take place then. But that isn't what happened. They introduced the bill on Thursday. We're already here on Tuesday, debating the nuances of what is a quite technical piece of legislation.

I'll continue to quote:

It contains measures that we did not anticipate from a single consultation on a potential bargaining framework that was facilitated by your staff,

referring to the consultations that took place earlier in the summer.

We believe that as locally elected school boards, democratically chosen to represent our students, their families, and our constituents, we should be given more than a few days to properly review the proposed legislation to provide you with our recommendations on Bill 8 prior to passing it into law.

The letter goes on, but those are the high points, Mr. Speaker.

It's with that in mind that I would like to table an amendment. This amendment, Mr. Speaker, is one that members of the opposition are quite familiar with. If you don't mind, sir, I would like to proceed while the amendment is passed out. This amendment is one that is becoming quite familiar in this place.

An Hon. Member: My guess: is it a hoist?

3:40

Mr. Cooper: It's not a hoist because that would stop a bill, and we don't suggest that this bill needs to be stopped.

Listen, the framework that's going to be created is a very important framework for the bargaining that's going to be taking place in the future. But what the framework needs to ensure is that all of the members, including TEBA, at the first round of negotiations can determine what is a provincial issue and what is a local issue. The only way that we're going to be able to make that happen is if this government sends a bill to committee.

For the record, Mr. Speaker, I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 8, Public Education Collective Bargaining Act, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 8, Public Education Collective Bargaining Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen the government on issues that are not nearly as significant in terms of private members' legislation send a bill to committee. In fact, with every piece of legislation that has come before this Assembly, the opposition has risen – I will withdraw that because there are maybe one or two that we haven't proposed this amendment to. But with the vast majority of legislation that has come before this Assembly, the opposition has risen and said that committees are important, that thoughtful reflection, consultation is important. The only time that we've seen a bill be accepted to committee is when the government rose on an opposition member's piece of legislation and sent that to committee, sir.

So it's my hope that today we can see a change in pace from this government, we can see a change in direction because goodness knows that there are other pieces of legislation that are currently before this House that are presently spiralling out of control because of the lack of consultation, and that could also be all solved by sending a bill to committee so that people, individuals, and in this case stakeholders can have their ability to chat, to talk about it.

What this bill does allow is ATA and the minister full breadth of negotiating power and not the same respect and authority for TEBA and locally elected school board trustees, and for that I think that we should probably pause, make sure that we get this right the first time . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, member.

Under 29(2)(a) would anyone like to speak? I will begin with the hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the hon. member. There seems to be a bit of a trend here, and we all recognize that many of us are new to this House. Some of us have been around before, some of the members of the front bench. You know, speaking from experience, there are things that I wish we could go back in certain instances and say: let's take a little bit more time; there are some things we need to take a look at here. I think some members from across the way spoke in great earnestness this morning about their lives and how they felt towards the government at the time, that, simply, the government of the day didn't care. They weren't listening. So, I guess the question to you, hon. member, is: it's my understanding that boards only got to see this legislation Friday, so that's only a few days ago. That's what they're saying, minister.

Then, secondly, would it be so bad – and I get it. In government, hon. Minister of Education, it is important that when you do draft a piece of legislation to get on with it, get on with the business and make things productive. To the member: maybe you could elaborate a little bit about what you've been hearing because it just seems to me that it's going too fast. The general consensus from school boards, from trustees is to slow down. I would support this amendment to slow it down, but I understand it's got to go quickly. Perhaps we can put a timeline to it, get the school boards together, get them to get their input, and move forward.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, hon. member. I think that you're bang on. There certainly seems to be a trend with the new government of rushing through pieces of legislation. I know that I've heard from a number of school divisions within the constituency of Olds-

Didsbury-Three Hills that also share that same concern. You know, the truth of the matter is that time can be a great healer, and I think that we're going to see, likely later in this week, some amendments to legislation that the government has only proposed a couple of weeks ago. My concern is that if we don't take the appropriate amount of time on Bill 8, we'll also wind up there, and that's why it's just so critically important that we make the most of the processes that we have established in the Assembly to ensure that we can provide proper reflection. One of those processes that is in place, Mr. Speaker, is the process of committee. It's a good process. It allows for expert testimony. It allows for many minds to provide input into this legislation, and my guess is that members of the current backbenches also could provide some quality feedback at committee, so I hope that that's what can happen.

I might just correct the record. My hon. colleague there mentioned that they didn't see it until Friday. He was way off, sir. It was Thursday, the day prior, that they got to see the bill, so I just wouldn't want people to have the impression that we were stretching any information here. It was Thursday, the day prior.

His point remains extremely valid when it comes to the need to ensure that school boards can have a voice on a piece of legislation that is going to dramatically impact their ability to bargain, the issues that they're going to be able to or not be able to bargain on, and the fact that they bring a very unique voice that only school boards can bring. We have school boards from rural Alberta. We have school boards from urban Alberta. What is a local issue in Carbon, Acme, and Linden might not necessarily be a big issue in Edmonton-Centre or Edmonton-Glenora or all of the other seats that take up the capital or Calgary or Red Deer or Medicine Hat or all of the larger cities. If those school boards don't have a voice at the table, Mr. Speaker, in the first round of consultations on deciding what's local and what isn't, we miss an opportunity to ensure that all Albertans are represented in what is a critically important bargaining negotiation.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Would anybody like to speak to the amendment? I'll recognize the Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. I am so happy that we're talking about public education and the role that school trustees have in the Legislature. When I think of my role as a school trustee in the past and the focus that I had to have on how well our students did and focusing all of the resources on the classroom, I am so happy that our government has introduced Bill 8 because Bill 8 is going to help school boards ensure that the most resources possible are focused on the classroom.

I just wanted to remind everyone in the House about the amount of consultation that the Minister of Education has had. I think that it's been mentioned in this House before, but I think it's really important that we know how many hours the Minister of Education has spent with each school board. He spent two hours with each of the 61 school boards, and I had the pleasure of being with the Minister of Education as he met with the francophone boards. So school boards have been consulted, and they knew that the government was looking at different ways of ensuring that in the next round of collective bargaining the process would be smooth, that it would ensure that every school board could meet their budget and that the teachers were fairly compensated.

3:50

The other thing that I think is important in this bill and why I don't think that we should be supporting the amendment that was proposed by the hon. member is that the bill leaves a lot of the

details to be discussed between the school boards and the ATA and the government. It doesn't preclude the role of school boards and their input into the important decisions that will be taken on this bill. The bill really wants to make sure that for the next round of bargaining there is a process in place that will make it fair and easy for all of the school boards to be able to meet their budgets when agreements are made with the ATA.

I would like to urge all members to not support the amendment. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Anyone under 29(2)(a)? I recognize the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a quick question for the hon. member. I respect your experience in education. I had 13 years around the world – kindergarten to university, three countries, and various subjects areas – yet I'm still learning a lot today. I've learned a lot in the last 11 years in this Chamber. I wonder if the member is familiar with the plethora – and I don't use words like that every day. But there are so many types of committees, not committees but types of committees, that I've seen in the last 11 years, too many for me to count right here and now. We've had numerous iterations of cabinet policy committees and special standing committees. It's a very, very long list.

But when it comes to all-party committees, I can tell you that – say what you will about the previous government – that was a creation of this previous government, and private members, especially, and opposition were absolutely delighted with their creation. It was unprecedented. It allowed an opportunity that had never ever been there for extremely important voices of elected representatives to be heard, not only them, not only those on the outside ring of the government side but all across here and much further to all elected representatives beyond these chambers, to places like school board rooms coming here, those folks who hear from parents and students and teachers, ATA, et cetera, every day.

Don't we want to hear from them on this? That's really my question. What do you think, Member? Should we take a little bit more time and get this right? This is not a hoist amendment by the hon. Wildrose member. This is not hoisting it. This is saying: send it to the committee. If the committees were not made for a purpose exactly like this, shall we disband all-party committees and not hear from private members and elected representatives, individuals, and stakeholders from across the province on any issue? Over to you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members like to respond under 29(2)(a)? I'll recognize the Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you. I'll be really quick. The Member for Sherwood Park mentioned that this bill would offer more resources in the classroom. I was just hoping you could explain to me how that works.

Ms McKittrick: Having been involved in collective bargaining in a number of organizations within the school system, I know that the sometimes long and laborious processes that individual boards sometimes need to undertake to achieve a collective agreement take time from my role as a school trustee, which is to ensure that the resources are going into the classroom. I see that this bill, by the way that the TEBA will be structured, will free a lot of time for school trustees to focus more on their role to ensure quality education in the school system rather than for 61 boards to sit individually and bargain with their individual teacher representation. That's why I meant that this bill, by the way that it is structured and by creating the TEBA organization, will allow school trustees and their staff to

be more present and to ensure that resources are going to the classroom rather than spending more on bargaining.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Please go ahead, Member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question that I have for the Member for Sherwood Park is – I guess we're making an assumption here that this is what the school boards want. Their role is to make sure that the money that is being spent fits within the budgets that they have been provided. I question whether the assumption is not flawed, that school boards would want to not be involved in that process. I question whether or not that's what they want. In fact, from what we're hearing, school boards are saying: slow down so that we can at least find out if this is something that they need and will be good for them. I don't think that it's a difficult ask. In fact . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Would anyone else like to speak to the amendment itself? I recognize the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this amendment asking that this be sent to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. I guess what I want to speak to here is just that I know that for some us, people in this Legislature that have an education background, perhaps we understand some of these issues and some of the underlying nuances of bargaining as it's been done traditionally, but I think that probably many in this House, who have not had any kind of a real impact or ability to engage in the education system, may not understand these things. I think that the Standing Committee on Families and Communities allows more reflection.

Yes, it's going to allow the school boards a chance to have a little more time to reflect and to look at this minister's work and to look at this process, but I think that this House needs to do a little bit of homework as well, and I think this committee is a perfect way of doing that. It's tasked with the idea and the focus of digging into these kinds of issues and coming back to the House with recommendations and with ideas. I think that this would be a perfect opportunity for a committee like this to deal with something that's – I mean, this is very, very important. We're dealing with people's livelihoods here. We're dealing with how they feed their families and the kind of working conditions that they face. How are we going to approach coming to mutual agreement on the kinds of issues that teachers and schools and school boards face with regard to the monies and how they're going to be spent? I think this committee would be a perfect place for us to study that.

I think it's important that this committee take a look at the history of bargaining in this province. I'm not sure that everybody in this House understands the concept of, really, what in many cases is called local bargaining and why we've done that in the past, the advantages and the disadvantages that have come from local bargaining.

We know that some of the school boards in this province are in agreement that maybe we should pursue a different model. Well, it seems and it would appear, if we take a look at the ASBA and the PSBAA, that both of those organizations still seem to and have chosen to support the concept of local bargaining. While we understand that the minister has gone to a lot of work in consulting at the front end of this and has proposed a two-tier system, we probably need to take some time as a House and as a Legislature and especially on this committee to take a look at the benefits of local bargaining versus the benefits of this new model of bargaining.

4:00

We know that there have been issues. That's pretty clear for anybody that's been involved in education. We know that in 1994 there were problems with local bargaining before, and I think there are probably some individuals in this House that were in education at the time and realized that at the end of a new bargaining model, they were down 5 per cent at the end of the day.

That new bargaining model was an attempt to address several issues: one, the reality that the government of the day believed that they needed to get control of the spending in education and believed that a new model was needed to do that, but secondly, they saw inequities. They saw inequities in the funding between school boards and that this was creating a problem with educating our children, so they needed a new model. One of the things that the government did, that maybe some of the members here are not aware of and that this committee could help educate us on and look into these issues, is that the government took the taxing powers of the school boards away. They collected the money from property taxes and put it into a collective pot and came out with money that would be per-pupil funding for schools.

Now, you know, that was a pretty big introduction of change in the model of bargaining and in how we were going to do things, and I think that if we're going to move away from that – honestly, the minister knows that we've had some conversations in the past. There have been some issues with this model of bargaining, and we just have to take a look at the fact that the last two collective agreements have been done provincially rather than purely locally. There maybe needs to be some discussion as to how we could change this model, but I believe this committee needs to take a look at and consider the issues that may be brought up by school boards in this province.

If we're going to have success with a new model of bargaining, it would just appear to me – as a teacher I understood this. As a teacher I understood that if I was going to have success in my classroom, I had to be able to ensure that my students were engaged in their learning, that they had a positive relationship with me, that the parents understood who this teacher was that they placed in charge of their kids, that they had trust and confidence in me as a teacher, and that my principals all understood that I was teaching the curriculum and that I knew how to engage my students with different pedagogy to ensure that they would have success. It's a model of education that engages all of the major stakeholders and makes sure that they're a part of the process so that at the end of the day our students are educated and confident and able to partake in the society that they live in.

Well, I believe that if you're going to have success with this model of education, this bargaining model, we're going to need to make sure that all of the stakeholders are heard, that all of the stakeholders are considered, and that we have a bargaining model that at the end of the day has the support of all the major stakeholders. I knew that that was the success for me in my classroom, and I believe it's going to need to be done here if we're going to have a successful bargaining model. I believe this committee could call in school boards. This committee could ask for their concerns and then listen to their proposals for how we could make this a better bill and then bring these back to the minister with the idea of creating a law that will stand in place not just for a few years but for many, many years, serving the parents, the students, the school boards, and the teachers that make up our education system.

Now, I think that this committee could – and I really wonder sometimes. I know that for somebody like myself, you know, the shadow minister of Education: yeah, sure, I have to dig into this bill, and I have to try to understand it. I believe it's important for

the people on this committee to also understand the nuances in this bill. I think they even need to be able to understand that this formalizes a province-wide two-tier system of bargaining, that the provincial table will address the broader issues, the issues, as it states in the bill, for those that have significant monetary expenditures and for those where all of the school boards would share a common concern in that area. But if we don't start to talk about these kinds of things, how are we going to make wise decisions in this House? I believe this committee could help in that education process.

It's important. I mean, we have been talking in a very short period of time so far with school boards, and they're expressing concern over what would be a provincial issue. Based on the criteria that are in this bill, how would you determine what is a provincial and what is a local issue? What kinds of issues really are not significantly monetary? Which issues, if they affect one school board, wouldn't affect all of the school boards, and how do we determine that?

There is some concern as to the kinds of things that would be set up by a two-tier model here. I think that as a committee we could start taking a look at that. We could start looking at the kinds of recommendations after we've listened to some of the experts on this issue, and we could then come back to the House with some recommendations.

Mr. Minister, you said that the bill came out on Thursday, if I'm correct. Yeah. You know, really, we've only had Friday, and for those of us that continued – and I think that's probably all of us in this House – working on Saturday and maybe even Sunday and into yesterday and today, there have been only four or five days that we've had the opportunity to actually sit down and consider this.

I know that I've talked with school boards that are saying: listen, we're not even prepared to meet as a school board until, you know, the 15th or the 16th of this month. That's a significant problem for them. For something that's as important as this, why not give them the opportunity to sit down and talk as a school board to be able to see where they fit into this, whether they can actually live with this? The timeline is an issue here, and it's not because there was a lack of consultation. I'll give the Minister of Education his dues here. You went out and talked with the school boards ahead of time, and that's a really good thing.

I'm going to draw again a little bit of an educational analogy here. I know that in my classroom when we sat down and we started to take a look at an issue, we would brainstorm, we would talk, and we would try to focus our conversation on the issue under discussion. Then we would perhaps send them out to do some research. They would go out, and they would look at various sources. Some might go to the library, go to the shelves and see what we had in our stack of ancient library material. Some might go out and interview some people in our community that were pertinent to the issue. Others would go onto the famous Internet, and you could see how much time they actually spent on topic. At the end of the time they would come together, and they would look at their research. They would discuss the value of the information that they had discovered. Then they would talk with each other and see how it met the issue of the day and what ramifications would come out of that.

I guess that's the process that I would urge the minister to use right now and to use the committee as a part of that process, a part of gathering the research and information. Find out from your stakeholders what they really want, where they fall. You know, there's a lot of hard work that's gone into this, and maybe the government isn't willing to simply shelve this for local bargaining. On the other hand, maybe they are willing to take a look and see some of the concerns and address some of those concerns by

amending this piece of legislation with the recommendations that come from this committee.

I would suggest that this is a very reasonable step in the process of consultation, that this amendment should be supported by the House, that it can look at the various issues that have been brought up, whether the two-tier model is what the boards want or not. They can take a look at some of the problems that the school boards have with this model, and they can even, perhaps, ask the school boards about some of the regulations that could be made after passing this bill so that they can do some forward thinking once they've considered what this bill is going to look like after and if it's passed by this House.

I think that this is an amendment that we could speak to in the positive in this House. I believe that this amendment is a reasonable amendment. I think that it sends it to the right committee. This is the committee that should deal with it, the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. I would encourage this House to vote in favour of this amendment.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Under 29(2)(a) would anyone like to make a comment or question? I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

4:10

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, coming to grips with this bill as I am, I appreciate the previous speaker's insights, and I guess I would ask: if this was to proceed, would there be any conditions under which he feels it could proceed?

Mr. Smith: Thank you for the question. I'm assuming that what you're referring to is: are there any conditions after the committee has met?

Dr. Swann: No.

Mr. Smith: Okay. Are there any conditions, then, during the committee?

Dr. Swann: Are there any conditions that would, through amendments to this bill, in your view, allow it to proceed and satisfy the concerns that boards have around this review?

Mr. Smith: Thank you very much. Okay. Mr. Speaker, I know that when we've talked with some of our school boards, they have voiced some concerns and some suggestions that they would like to see. Assuming that the government is not willing to pursue and go down the path of going back to pure local bargaining, if they are going to have a two-tier model, they, for instance, would like to see TEBA included in the first round of discussions so that it isn't just the government and the ATA that will be setting out the criteria and the issues that they wanted to negotiate at the beginning. TEBA, as one of the major stakeholders of this process, should be involved from the very beginning. That just seems to me to be a reasonable and fair position to take, that if you've got the three major stakeholders – the government, the teachers represented through the ATA, and the school boards that represent the parents and the students and that represent how money is spent within education – they would be a part of that very first process.

You know, we've had some discussion with some that are concerned and wondering why the Auditor General would not be a part of overseeing TEBA. There is a section in there that needs a little more clarification, and maybe that's something that this committee could look at and ask why the funds expended through the negotiating and bargaining process that TEBA and the government

and the ATA would be a part of – why would those things not be under the purview of the Auditor General? That might be something that we would want to see discussed, and maybe the committee could come back to this House with some recommendations one way or the other with some reasons one way or the other on those kinds of issues.

You know, one of the problems that many of the school boards that we've talked with have come up with is just that this bill deals with the process of negotiation and that many of the issues that surround this process are fairly vague. So we'd like to see some clarification, perhaps some discussion, about some of the regulations that would accompany this. For instance – and it's been alluded to already in this House – the minister has the ability to appoint to the committee that will represent TEBA at the negotiation process. Why? Who would that be? Why would the people that represent TEBA not be from purely the school boards? Why would he see an issue with wanting to have to put in people that may not have anything to do with the school boards?

Maybe we misunderstand, but those are the concerns that are coming out of the school boards. I mean, one of the biggest problems that we have, I think, sometimes in life but also in this House and as people is that sometimes if we don't understand something, we fear it.

Mr. Mason: That's Bill 6 in a nutshell.

Mr. Smith: Well, you know, you may be correct. The member is absolutely free to have his opinion on that issue.

You know, if we could take the time in this committee to answer those kinds of questions or to ask and to work with the minister through this committee to answer those kinds of questions, get rid of some of that fear, then perhaps this would end up with a bill that is really very successful and meets the needs of the educational establishment.

Have I answered your question?

The Acting Speaker: We only have seven seconds under 29(2)(a), so perhaps I'll just proceed along and ask if anyone would like to address the amendment. I'll call on the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the time that we've had this bill, I've had a chance to reflect on it a little bit, not a huge amount. One of the great things about being the only member from my party and also one of the challenges is that we get to speak about absolutely everything.

Mr. Cooper: What's your party position on this?

Mr. Clark: Well, my party position – I may release a shadow Bill 8. We'll see. It's barely gone 4 p.m. today, and there are many, many hours left in the day for us to do some work.

Having said that, based on research that we've done looking at other provinces, other jurisdictions, at the end of the day likely we will support Bill 8. But I have tremendous sympathy for the idea of sending this to committee because there is a lot of work yet to be done on this. There are many questions yet to be answered.

You know, the overall consultation: it's been said many times in this House today – and I think the Minister of Education deserves some credit and praise for his extensive efforts to consult and meet with school boards and travel the province and talk with folks. But the question here is: what exactly was the question that was asked in that consultation? Was the question, "What would you like the process to look like?" or was the question, "What would you like the two-table process to look like?" It's a little bit like when my children were younger. The question wasn't: what would you like

to eat? The question was: would you like peas or carrots? You're having a vegetable. That's been determined. It seems like there's a sense of this. There's some sensitivity – and I think rightly so – particularly in rural Alberta, but around the province, about a bunch of unanswered questions, about . . .

Mr. Cooper: The defender of rural Alberta.

Mr. Clark: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills rightly identifies me as a defender of rural Alberta. Absolutely right. Absolutely right.

But, you know, I think the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon also raised a good point, that where there's a vacuum, there's uncertainty and that we fill that uncertainty with fear. In this case I think it is, in fact, a framework with gaps that are to be filled through regulation. I worry that that may be becoming a bit of a theme for this government as it was with past governments.

The worry that has been expressed to me by school boards is that there's a one size fits all on the way from this negotiating process. There are significant differences between boards around the province, within and between not just rural and urban but within and between urban and within and between rural boards as well, around very important operational matters of how the school boards operate, around teaching hours, around lunch supervision, and around many, many other issues. In fact, I've met with representatives of some school boards earlier today. They raised some of those issues with me. I've asked them to please provide further input to me on exactly what their concerns are, because I want to learn more about this. As has been identified earlier, we do an awful lot of learning in this place.

Sending this to committee gives us an opportunity to reflect, recognizing that there's a timeline here, that time is relatively short. We need to get into that collective bargaining process, but we do I think have time here to get this into committee.

When all those questions are answered, I likely will support Bill 8 because it is something, as I understand, that is generally a direction that is going around the country. But I rise in support of the amendment. I think it's important that we take some time to reflect.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) would anyone like to comment or ask a question? I recognize the Member for – oh, darn. Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills?

Mr. Cooper: Yes. I know that it's very forgettable, and for that I have no malice.

I was just wondering if the independent Member for Calgary-Elbow would mind passing along to us just a sense of how many school boards he might represent in that constituency there and the sort of breadth of the opportunity he might have for input. I mean this genuinely, not in any sort of joking way. Like, give us a sense of just the type of, the amount of feedback that you think you might receive or that you could receive and the school boards that affect the beautiful constituency you represent.

4:20

Mr. Clark: Well, first off, to the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, I think it's important to read the word "hooray" into *Hansard* if we haven't had an opportunity to do that. So hooray for the question.

You know, I think it's important, not just as leader of a party but, I think, for all of us as representatives in this House, that we represent not just the people who have elected us in our individual constituencies but that we represent, ultimately, all Albertans. Yes,

while the two major school boards represented in Calgary-Elbow are the Calgary public school board and the Calgary Catholic school board, large school boards, there are charter schools in Calgary-Elbow, there are francophone schools, and there are private schools in Calgary-Elbow as well, so there is a breadth there.

You know, earlier today I met with representatives of half a dozen rural school boards from not just surrounding Calgary but around the province as well, so we're certainly doing our homework and our research. Ironically, on this particular topic I've only spoken with rural school board members. I haven't actually had the chance to speak directly with any school board representatives for the large urban boards in particular, that make up most of the schools in Calgary-Elbow, but I've asked our team to reach out, get their perspective as well. But I think that speaks to exactly why this amendment is a good idea: to give us the time to reflect, to learn more, to talk with more school boards, not just in our own constituencies but all around the province as well.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any further questions under 29(2)(a)?

Dr. Swann: I'm just wondering if the hon. member knows – and this is for my information. What's the deadline for negotiations, and what kind of timing do we have? I'm in a dilemma around this because I share some of the concerns on this side, and I'm just not sure what kind of timeline we have. Does the hon. member know when this has to be completed?

Mr. Clark: I don't know that, but perhaps the Education minister can rise under 29(2)(a) and let us know.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I think this is important. We're trying to sort this out using this venue as a mechanism by which we can sort things out. An important piece of information that everybody needs to know – I'll form this in a question, somehow, like *Jeopardy!* – is that after December 31 the individual school boards can start individual negotiations with each individual local. So after this December 31 the whole notion of having this TEBA board, which is, by the way, guys, just to sort this out – I mean, it's an employers' board. It's the school boards' board, is what it is. It's not the teachers'. It's the teachers' employers, so they employ the teachers.

The terms of reference would be set by the school boards. It is a school board representative body that would do the one table, which would be wages – right? – the big one, then we would be there as well because we are the funder. That's a good way to do it. After December 31 – and we had a fair bit of time here. I'll talk more about the consultations and just the breadth of what we did and how we did it. After December 31 we can lose that opportunity to even execute this concept. That's something to think about, everybody, for sure.

The Acting Speaker: Other comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, would anybody else like to address the amendment? I recognize the Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Just think of the cable company and you'll remember.

I'm going to be brief on this. This is my major concern about this amendment and sending it to committee. I know the committee process can sometimes take a long time, especially depending on how detailed you go into it. The minister already alluded to this in detail, that we're on a limited timeline here. Negotiations are very complex. We need to start planning. We need to develop the TEBA board. We need to figure out which is going to sit on which part of

the local and the provincial bargaining tables. I'm afraid that if we do this, if we move forward with moving this into committee, we aren't going to be able to develop this properly, we aren't going to be able to do a proper negotiation model, and down the road what will end up happening is that we could lead to strike actions, which would not be good for any students. This could lead to us having a very unfair deal.

With that being said, with as much briefness as I want because I know that time is very valuable, I would encourage this House not to support this amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Again under 29(2)(a), any response or comment? I recognize the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Member from Calgary-Shaw: have you actually talked to any school boards in your jurisdiction?

Mr. Sucha: I've talked to all my school boards in my jurisdiction.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), anybody? I recognize the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. For the question. I understand the December 31 date, but I think that it might be somewhat artificial. I think that we should also say that the contract expiry date is not until July 16, which is seven months out, somewhat. Is that not correct?

Mr. Sucha: As the member alluded, the negotiation process can start in April, so we actually don't have as long of a window to start this process. We ultimately don't want to do work without a contract as well.

Mr. Orr: When does the current contract expire?

The Acting Speaker: Sorry; I just want to interrupt. That was a second question, and I can't allow a second question.

Mr. Orr: Okay.

The Acting Speaker: Would anybody else like to – I recognize the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Just a couple of comments to the member. Just for clarification's sake, I'm curious to know, following on from my hon. colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka, when that contract does expire. I might just add that there are lots of ways that we can manage through the committee process in terms of putting reasonable timelines on it.

The other questions that I might just ask, one being: when does the contract expire? The other: this House sat approximately 35 days ago for the very first day, and I wondered if the hon. member knows if this bill could have been presented before the House at that time and then allowed more opportunity for discussion amongst school board trustees so that we wouldn't be in this time crunch.

Mr. Sucha: Well, to be fair to the minister, as many of the members in this House have alluded to, he was meeting with members of school boards until about the end of October, so a lot of primary discussions were happening during this time. Then, ultimately, the bill had to be drafted by his team, which would give some time for that as well. Then there's research that's done with the drafting of this bill, so subsequently amendments and changes are being made as well. I don't see how this bill could have hit this House before last Thursday.

With that being said, going to the second question, all the contracts are up for expiry at the end of August as well.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)? I recognize the Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that there hasn't been true local bargaining in about 15 years, I wonder if the member could just talk about if he thinks that the current system is broken, and if so, if he thinks that this is a way to move forward in having two tables, one to discuss local issues and one to discuss provincial issues. Of course, the biggest provincial issue, I'd say, is funding the actual collective agreements that get negotiated. Would the hon. member think that this would be a way to work in partnership to address both local and provincial issues?

Mr. Sucha: I apologize for using the analogy that has been used countless times in this House during this subject, but one size does not fit all, and that's what two tables is all about. It's recognizing that we don't want to sacrifice the negotiation piece when it refers to things like salaries but that there is a divide between issues that impact certain rural boards and urban boards, and even certain urban boards have different challenges as well. I can tell you that the francophone board in Calgary has only two schools, so there is a large gap in distance compared to local Calgary public schools, that have two in one community.

You know, at the end of the day, it's prudent to have a model that recognizes that there are certain individual challenges for every single board and also recognizes that when it comes to negotiating things like salaries, we are all kind of in this together and that we have to make sure that we get the best deal for all Albertans and for all children.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: We are done with 29(2)(a).

Would anyone like to address the amendment? I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to be brief. I support the amendment. I think that one of the toughest things about sitting on the government side of the House is looking at a motion that comes from this side of the House and deciding: is that going to help me or hurt me if I support it? That would be a fair question, and members on the government side would be right to start out suspicious about that.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that some of it actually comes to help, and this is one of those things. When governments get in trouble, very often it's when they don't take the time ahead of the legislation to actually talk to Albertans, the ones affected by the legislation, and make a decision on that. Again, when legislation goes through without that – one of the few things that can actually save a piece of legislation if it's brought forward before the consultation is adequately completed is a motion like this, to get it to committee. In fact, in this current session there are a few pieces of legislation that would benefit from a trip through the committee system.

An Hon. Member: Bill 6?

Mr. McIver: We're not on Bill 6, but, yes, it comes to mind as a random example.

This is another case where, government members, your government might actually benefit from allowing this to go through the committee process. I think that this is an important piece of legislation. I have no reason to believe that the government's

intentions were anything less than good when bringing this forward. Nonetheless, some of the communications that have come through my office from school boards would indicate that they haven't been talked to in a way that they would acknowledge as consultation. Again, a good way to cure that would be to take some time in the committee system.

Lots of benefits for government. You get us on this side of the House on the record in committee. Think about the benefits of that. You get to take submissions from other people should the committee decide to do so, and some of those people could be school boards or organizations that the school boards belong to. You could really build a case for why the legislation is a good idea, and you might even come up with some good ideas for amendments through committee that you would be happier with, yourselves and your government. I think that it could improve your chances of having a piece of legislation that you could be proud of down the road, that you wouldn't get a lot of stick for because people don't like it, something that'll work.

That's why I'm supporting the amendment. I would politely, I hope, request that members of the House consider doing the same. Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) I'll recognize the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that the hon. member rose to speak to this. The hon. member has a lot of experience in this House, and it was while the hon. member was in government that standing committees were established. I would like to ask the hon. member if he could elaborate on the value of putting bills to standing committees for the sake of the MLAs that are elected in this House who don't have a lot to do with crafting legislation. There is this process of standing committees that was brought to this House, and I'm a little bit surprised that the members opposite who are part of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities are not supporting an amendment that gives them something to do to directly impact a piece of legislation that is so profound, really. It's going to completely transform the bargaining process in this province, yet they don't appear to want to participate. Could you elaborate on the value of such participation by all of the members of this House that belong to these standing committees?

Mr. Mason: Ask him how many times they did it.

The Acting Speaker: Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? We all come to this House with value. We all have intelligence and thoughts, that could have value, that we bring to a process. As the hon. member asked, I'd say that this really will give you a chance to put a mark on something that matters. The Education budget is the second-biggest in government. This is to do with the process for bargaining on that. The collective wisdom is very often greater than the wisdom of the few.

It was also while I was up that I heard from the Government House Leader. Well, he didn't have the floor, but I heard it anyways. He said: ask them how often they did it. Mr. Speaker, that was a good question. It was out of order, but it was a good question because I would say – that was part of my comments to members on the other side – that we probably regretted sometimes when we didn't send things to committee.

That's why when I opened my remarks – one of the toughest things when a motion like this comes, particularly for the government members, is to think about: is this good for me, or is this not good for me? The things that went poorly or in a bad way when we

were in government were some times when we didn't take the time to put something through committee. And, yes, it did happen sometimes when we didn't consult enough on the front end. Those are the things that come to bite you – those are the things that come to bite you – at election time, when you notice it, when you really notice it. That's what I would say.

To the member that asked the question, I think there is great value. It's great to go back to your constituents and say: I helped bring this amendment forward on this piece of legislation, that actually made it better. I think the issue of fairness, from the Member for Calgary-Shaw, was mentioned. It will be something that's more fair, more balanced between the rights of the taxpayers to get a good deal and the rights of the teachers to be paid fairly. It all does start with the empowerment of the legislation.

The shorter answer is: absolutely, there's value. All members of the House will have an increased chance of bringing that value. All members of the House would have a chance of having something to take back to their constituency, to say: "See? This is what I did. This is what I worked on, and I'm proud of it, and this is why you're paying me." So I would say: don't waste this opportunity. This can be a very good thing for all parties here if we put this through the committee.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) I recognize the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Member for Calgary-Hayes, thank you for your insights. Because you've been here a lot longer than at least this MLA and because you were on the government benches at one point in time, I guess my question could go to you. I'm not even sure if I could put it to a minister at this particular point in time because I don't know the rules of the House that well, so I'll put it to you, okay? Here's the question. We know that the Education Act was passed by the previous government and has not been proclaimed for many, many, many years, yet the education system has continued to move on, and . . .

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry; 29(2)(a) is now done.

Would anybody like to address the actual amendment itself? I recognize the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. Yes, I would like to speak to the amendment. Well, I will say that I am in favour of the amendment although, truthfully, I'm not really sure where I stand yet on the actual bill. I think there's a lot of consideration that needs to be given to this. There needs to be time for understanding to come to a good position on it, not just for myself but for the members of this House and particularly for others. I do think there needs to be time for consultation.

4:40

I would like to reference a letter that is actually dated today. It's addressed to the Minister of Education. I don't expect that you've had an opportunity to see this because it is addressed today – it'll come to you – but I do think that it has some interesting content, some interesting points. It comes from one of the school boards in my riding, actually from the chair of that school board. He says that he's actually very concerned about Bill 8, and I would like to just identify some of his concerns because I think they're important for the House, and I'd like them on the record.

He says that in the brief consultation held in September the trustees felt that the steps that were being taken would lead to the "continual erosion of the rights and responsibilities of school boards." Be that as it may – I don't know; I just report what he is

saying. We have seen more authority being gathered to the central body of government, to cabinet, so his point may be worth taking.

Then he says:

In the absence of local autonomy, we may see rural education taking [yet another] hit as labour solutions that work in the city don't . . . fit in rural communities.

I think that he raises a very important problem there, that a centralized, single, fits-all solution to this is not going to be helpful in some situations.

He says also:

Should a provincial model be initiated, it was our board's position that during the preliminary consultations that the [Alberta School Boards Association] should be the body that represents our boards.

These are questions that a school board is raising. These are their concerns. They want them as their bargaining agent.

Then he says – and I think that this is an extremely important statement. He says:

We have further concerns that the preliminary consultations were simply not framed as the basis for the development of Bill 8, and [we] believe they shouldn't be used as such.

I'm hearing the members on this side of the floor say to me: yes, we went and consulted; yes, we went and talked to them; yes, we've listened to them. But here I have the chair of a school board saying that he didn't quite realize the discussion was really about Bill 8 and that it shouldn't be taken that way.

Although I think that the members opposite believe they have fully consulted, what we're reading is that they don't feel that way at all. They have serious concerns about that. They simply do not believe that the consultation – "the preliminary consultations," he calls them, "were simply not framed as the basis for the development of Bill 8." If they didn't realize that you were building Bill 8 out of your conversations with them, that in their mind at least is not real consultation, and they feel that it would be unfair that it would be used in that context. He says:

In this context, we believe Bill 8 does not reflect the feedback provided in that consultation.

Maybe you listened to a few things from them, but they feel like you haven't given any accountability to it. You haven't figured any of their comments into what you've gone ahead and done anyway.

He says:

These are but a few of our initial cursory concerns.

Then he talks about:

Given your apparent timeline for the [progress] of Bill 8, we are additionally concerned about our inability to dialogue and [have any further consultation] on the significant . . . shift this bill proposes.

Now, I can understand that. If they feel like they didn't know that they were really talking about Bill 8 and now they have no other opportunity to comment on that, then they feel like they have been overridden. They have not been listened to.

Having not seen your proposed legislation prior to November 25th, which is probably the disputed Thursday that we've been talking about,

it contains measures not anticipated from the preliminary consultations facilitated by your staff.

I think that you believe that you consulted with them, but I don't think that you did it in a way that they understood what you were expecting to do with all of that. They certainly don't feel like it was valid or that it was legitimate. They feel like they had the bill dropped on them on November 25 and then had no opportunity to respond to that.

He says:

In agreement with many fellow boards, we believe that locally elected school boards representing local constituents, and

addressing local issues, should be given more than a few days to review proposed legislation affecting one of the primary responsibilities of school boards.

We realize and he realizes that the government is saying: yes, we've consulted; yes, we've listened. But I would suggest to you that your process of consultation is not being effective with the people that you need to be listening to. We've seen that with just about every bill that's come forward.

I mean, as I said, I'm not sure the direction this bill should take. I do know that this school board does not feel like they have been consulted. They feel like there was a little bit of a process so that it could be called that but that nobody, in fact, listened to them. I just pass on to you the reality of a school board in my riding.

He says:

We trust this discussion will occur prior to the passage of Bill 8. While I appreciate your Board Chairs teleconference of Friday, November 27th, having not had any further opportunity to meet or share our concerns with you, we would look for every opportunity to discuss Bill 8 with you prior to its further progression.

This needs to go to committee. I mean, if you really want these people on your side, they need an opportunity to actually talk about the bill, not just a general sort of nice conversation. There is real concern with this, and I think it needs to be considered.

They have a couple of very specific questions they would like answers to. First: "In drafting Bill 8, what was the process employed by your office to analyse the preliminary consultation feedback from Boards?" They feel like it hasn't been listened to. Second question: "Were any boards additionally consulted in the drafting of Bill 8?" Thirdly: "What is the rationale for the proposed TEBA to exist outside of the ASBA, the association currently representing all 61 School Boards?"

My friends across the way, I don't have a position yet, but I know that this is a school board that does not feel like you are listening to them. I have to say that consultation, sending it to committee, would be the only responsible thing to do. It would be the only right thing to do. I spent a lot of time in past years dealing with and working together with democratic kinds of groups, small agencies and associations, where board members sometimes precook decisions before AGMs and things like that. Then they set it all out and expect the members to vote for it, and too often the individual members feel like: well, it's already decided; what's the point of me saying anything? I think this is how the school boards are feeling at this point in time.

On the weekend I was at a public event, and someone came up to me and said: I actually voted NDP, but what's happening there isn't real NDP; they're not true NDPs; they've forgotten the word "democratic" in this whole thing; these people aren't democratic; they're not doing democratic things. This is what this individual said to me. He said: real New Democrats wouldn't do this kind of stuff.

I have to ask: why is it that they're suddenly losing the D, the democratic? It leaves me and school boards wondering and questioning, and quite honestly I do have to question why. Is it catering to the ATA at the cost of school boards? Are there ulterior motives? Why the rush? I mean, if there's not a willingness to be open, not a willingness to consult, it leaves us beginning to suspect: okay; what's going on here? Is it that you don't really want to hear from the school boards, they're a bothersome nuisance, you just want to do what you want to do and get it done? Is it about bulldozing it through so quick that nobody has time to respond, so that your agenda is completed? I don't know. Is it that you don't trust the school boards and their comments? I said it yesterday, and I'm going to say it again: the right thing done in the wrong way will never produce the right results.

4:50

I do commend the minister for having made an effort to consult. It's more than we've seen on some of these other bills. But I don't think the school boards feel like they have been consulted with. I think the process is rushed. I think there are a lot of people in our province that don't understand what the huge rush is to shove all this stuff through before Christmas. It leaves people thinking there's something fishy here, and I have no idea what it is because, as I said, I'm not sure where this bill should even go. But I do know that in most social institutions people understand that procedure is often as important as content, and when procedure is abused and misused, it never, ever can lead to a good result.

So I have real concerns about pushing this through in a haphazard and in a quick way. I think some of the other members have spoken it well. This needs to go to committee. I would beg you to take it to committee for your own good. We're not trying to trick you into something here. This is the way process should go. When it doesn't go this way, well, somewhere down the road it will backfire, and don't say that you weren't warned.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Under 29(2)(a) I'll recognize the Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I'll try to use this opportunity to . . .

Ms Hoffman: To help.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, to give a hand, right?

Once again – and I confirmed it again – in regard to the consultation, certainly, we did do lots, and I'll speak about that more. I have, for example, the agenda of the full-day meetings that we had with the school boards. The first item was establishing a bargaining association. Another discussion item was province-wide, two-tier bargaining. Number 3: level of government involvement and employee representation. So it was very clear what we were doing. That was just one layer with experts that I thought were very, very good, and then I came around, too, and a similar process was followed.

Sometimes people don't like to see the results of how things come out. Perhaps, you know, that's what I have to work with, right? I mean, that's part of my responsibility, to ensure that we're working through. That's why, in fact, we did make some modifications over time with this bill to make sure that the two tables – number one, again, very clear: it's the teachers' employer bargaining association. So it's the school boards that are represented with the TEBA, right? Then they're negotiating with the teachers, so that's kind of how it's split apart.

Again, I confirmed it again because I wanted to make sure. By December 31 a number of school boards can start negotiating on their own, okay? That's why the day that I was – well, probably a couple of days after I was appointed the Minister of Education I started on this process and set up the consultation that I did, and we're continuing on with that as well.

We have another set of consultations that are happening that I'll describe later when I make some final comments. There are three more in Calgary and Edmonton here in the next few days, just to clarify some of these issues, because, you know, I really do believe in collaboration. It's very important to have people functioning together to see that this will be an opportunity for all the local issues to be negotiated in a clean and clear and concise sort of way and have the funder there for the wage negotiations. What appears at those two tables is up to the TEBA, which is the school boards as

well as us and then the teachers on the other side. That's negotiated straight up like you would negotiate any other parts of the contract, okay?

Again, I'll finish with a question, of course, just because that's kind of what it's supposed to be. I hope that you might understand that December 31 is a real deadline by which the whole idea of having some central bargaining would potentially be extinguished. Certainly, we've seen that in the past. In the last 15 years or so, you know, you had the bargaining breaking down. We need to control costs, right? It's very important to do so. That's the biggest reason we have, to have the wage part of this and so forth under provincial, so that the actual funder is at the table to make sure that things don't spin out of control like they have done in the past, where individual boards went with something big that we couldn't afford. They call it a whipsaw effect in negotiating. So I'll end with a question. Have you ever heard of the word "whipsaw"?

Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Would you like to respond to that?

Mr. Orr: Just to say thank you and I realize it's a complex process. As I said, I still have not totally made up my mind. I'm just passing on what I think one school board has said. I do appreciate you're working on it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else under 29(2)(a)? I recognize the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: For the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. We've heard from the minister that there was this consultation process that took place through the summer with different school boards across the province. Now, if a joint letter was to come from the school boards across this province, a number of them, begging the minister to slow down and send this bill to committee, do you suppose that the responsible thing to do would be to do just what the school boards have requested and send this bill to committee?

Mr. Orr: Well, I can't answer for the minister, but I would say that if I was in that role, I would in fact do that.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: We are finished with 29(2)(a).
Would anybody else like to speak to the amendment?

[The Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to the amendment to Bill 8. With all due respect to the Education minister, I represent four school boards, and that's why I'm standing today, because all of the school boards that I've talked to in my constituency want me to ask you to slow this down. Despite the fact that you may have consulted with them in the past, I think that they think they've been involved in a little bit of a shell game here, and they would like to speak to you again about Bill 8.

I'll just share a couple of comments. I actually just got off the phone here about half an hour ago with one of the school board chairs. She feels that this is being rushed. They've had no chance to look over and discuss with other boards, and there is a significant difference between the input that the school boards indicated and what the minister is now saying. That is their feeling. That's their words, not mine. They don't feel that a three-minute phone call on

Friday provided anything new compared to what the minister had said before to them. Again, with all due respect, sir, I think the school boards in our province deserve to be heard, and that's why I would promote that this would go to committee and offer some further discussion, further opportunities for them.

Just a couple other comments that we have. It says:

We understand that there is consideration for second and third reading to be completed and the passage of this legislation into law ... We believe that, as locally elected school boards democratically chosen to represent our students, their families and our constituents, we should be given more than a few days to properly review the proposed legislation and to provide you with our recommendations on Bill 8 prior to being passed into law.

They don't feel that they were consulted on Bill 8 as it's proposed.

Another note that I got from them says:

We have done our analysis of it and are very concerned indeed ... Quite apart from that analysis though, is that we believe that it is unreasonable and disrespectful to locally elected school boards, for the Minister and the Government to rush to pass this legislation. A reasonable amount of time must be allowed for us to review it, and then to provide the opportunity for us to be engaged in meaningful consultation with the government on what we believe is best for our students. It really doesn't matter what our own individual opinions are now. We need the time and the opportunity to review, discuss, and then decide on our position going forward.

Another comment from another board.

We want longer term agreements (4-5 years) that protects local relationships with a finite amount of money that could be negotiated locally. We do have concerns of what the TEBA would look like? Who would be the representatives (would we be assured a rural voice)?

So there are a number of concerns from the school boards that I think we need to address before we push this thing through second and third readings.

5:00

Again, I would challenge the members opposite and the members in the House before we even vote on the amendment or on this bill to consult with your school boards and see what they're thinking. Do they feel that they've been properly represented and that the prior consultation actually was consultation on Bill 8? You know, after that, if we can get this thing through a little bit more discussion and I can consult with my school boards, I will vote on their recommendation because that's what we were elected for. It's not up to us to stand here and portray our opinions. It's the opinions of the boards and the schools that we represent, the teachers that we represent, the students that we represent, the communities that we represent.

For that reason, I would like to just slow this down. Let's go back and talk to those school boards, make sure that they are aware of what they were actually agreeing to prior to this summer.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any members that have a question for the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills?

Mr. Cyr: To the member. You talked about consulting. What exactly is it that you did to consult with your local boards? Did you call them? Did you send them e-mails? Did you send them letters? What exactly is it that you did to consult with your boards? That's my question.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much for the question, hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, my neighbour. Actually, I did quite a few things. I made phone calls and sent e-mails asking for their

input. On Friday morning, actually, prior to the three-minute warning that they got about Bill 8, I consulted with them, and they hadn't even had a chance to call in for their 11 o'clock meeting yet. They're all very concerned that their voices aren't being heard and that they're not being represented or that they're being misrepresented, actually, and they would definitely like further consultation on this before it's passed.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Any other questions for the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills? The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for that. Again, I'm using this 29(2)(a) in the broadest possible way, but I think it's probably helpful. I think, again, I just want to reiterate the importance that if we do want to have a table for province-wide wage negotiations, you know, that if we go past December 31, we end up in the same trap that has happened before, where individual school boards can start negotiating on their own. I mean, that's a very practical concern. Certainly, the legislative process that we have here, whether it's rushed or not – certainly, I will again in my closing comments explain or reiterate just how we went through the consultative process, both myself and my staff, in two different waves of consultation.

I don't want to get into this too much because it's not fair, but it can go two ways, right? Of course, if they are looking for more time, then by December 31 the whole thing becomes redundant anyway because some boards will start negotiating, and then, you know, the province-wide thing is gone for negotiating wages anyway. So you have got to think of it that way, too, right? People might just say: well, we'll just stall, and we'll take a little more time. And then – poof – of course, that window is gone, and then we're in trouble.

Again, for the sake of negotiating the big-ticket items with the second-biggest ministry, it's very important that you have the funder at the table, right? We've learned that over time. You know, we've never managed to achieve that, but I think that for the sake of fair negotiations for the workers' side and controlling costs for the province of Alberta, everybody who lives here and the school boards, for those two main things, that's very important – don't you think? – to try to achieve.

We have some time here now. I mean, this is a legislative process that we interact in with each other.

Certainly, we've set up some other opportunities as well: the Edmonton International Airport tomorrow from 1 to 4 p.m., the Calgary Clarion Hotel on Thursday at 9 a.m., and we have the Fantasyland Hotel on Friday at 10 a.m. for further direct interaction with my department officials. So I think that will be helpful as well.

You know, it's important to not confuse what this bill is trying to do, either. Please understand that it's just the how; it's the framework that the actual negotiations, what they negotiate, will hang on. It's a way to empower appropriately all of the 61 school boards with their own independent entity, that will be a statutory corporation. They will vote for their members to represent them on the negotiating team. It's pretty good, really. If you have all 61 there, then, of course, you have the representation there, so that's probably a fair way, a practical way to go.

It's not like we haven't thought about it carefully, and it's not like I haven't consulted quite a lot as well, you know. I really feel as though we can move ahead here using this time, which is also a bit adversarial sometimes. This is an interactive process that we have set up here as well in the Legislature.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I'm afraid, hon. members, that the time has passed for 29(2)(a).

Are there other members who would like to speak to amendment R1? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today because I want to discuss further the consultation that we need to see when it comes to legislation that passes through this House. We can legitimately pass Bill 8 fairly quickly, but the question is always: should we?

Right now we've got a newly formed government, and I understand that they want to change the world within six months. It's admirable to see that they want to make change, but if they're not doing the appropriate consultation or putting the appropriate thought into the fact that we've got a whole province to run, then we end up with angry stakeholders out front holding a massive demonstration against our wonderful Legislature here.

Now, it comes down to the fact that we keep hearing about a mandate. They're voted in. They've got a mandate. I don't remember seeing this as part of their platform. I could be wrong, but I don't remember seeing that. So Albertans haven't been aware that they wanted to change the collective bargaining process, they aren't aware that they're going to change this process within two or three weeks, and they're not aware of the repercussions of this.

What we need to be looking at is the fact that this is – and this has been stated over and over again – the second-biggest ministry that we have. The second-biggest ministry. We have a total budget of \$8.9 billion spent in this ministry. Now, \$7.6 billion is put to operations, most of which would be salaries and wages. Is this something that we want to rush through? We've got billions of dollars – billions of dollars – going through Education, and we're pushing through without proper consultation the wonderful TEBA.

Now, I believe that in the end we're hearing from stakeholders, that the minister has consulted some, but they were bringing a lot of concerns to the minister in these meetings. When you bring a lot of concerns to meetings, sometimes you don't understand exactly what it is the government is looking for.

5:10

Bill 8 is intended to formalize the two-table bargaining model. The first table is for items negotiated by the province. We understand that because this is so large, the province wants to be able to put their thoughts into the wages, and they should because this is, again, the second-biggest ministry. The fact is that what we've got are the salaries of the teachers. Our teachers are valued. Our principals are valued. Our trustees are valued. Our superintendents are valued. Everybody in the process is valued. We all also want to put our students first.

The fact is that the second table is for our local decision-making. This is for operational, pretty much nonspending or non major spending. Now, what we need to be looking at here is co-operation. We hope to see that these two different tables co-operate with each other. How are we going to get these two tables to co-operate with each other when they don't even understand what their roles are in this? The fact is that by rolling this out so fast, we really have pushed on what we feel the new process should look like, and we're just telling them what needs to be done.

Again, we've seen this before with Bill 6. We didn't consult; we introduced. That needs to be the big part here, that this needs to go through the proper process. For such a large amount of money that we have got going through the government on this, we need to make sure that our taxpayers are protected, our stakeholders are protected, Alberta's students are protected. What we need to be looking at is making sure that we go through the proper consultations. We need to make sure it goes to committee so that it gets debated in a

reasonable way. The minister has already stated that it is adversarial and that the reason this has been put in place is to make sure that we put through complete legislation and don't need to fix it for the next four years.

Now, the only consultation that preceded this bill would have been through meetings with the minister and his staff and the board members in October. However, the preliminary consultations were not framed as the basis of a development tool to build Bill 8; therefore, the bill does not reflect any consultations with the stakeholders at all. Again, what happens is that we see over and over again that our government goes out, they bring an agenda forward, and then what happens is that they decide that their agenda is what is best for Alberta and that the stakeholders don't need to be talked to at all. This pattern that we're seeing of the government leaving out stakeholders comes down to the fact that the opposition, the stakeholders have a purpose. Pushing something through fast and furiously defeats that.

Now, what we're looking at here is a bill that literally hit our laps on Thursday. The fact is that when we're looking at these bills – and they're moving through so fast – really, we need to question: is this appropriate? Is consulting after the fact appropriate? It is not consultation when it leaves out important details like the structure of the TEBA, and all issues raised centrally will not have been settled by the time this bill goes through. The implications of this bill are unknown, and more consultation needs to happen. This is something that we repeatedly keep telling the government and that they repeatedly continue to ignore.

This bill comes into effect on January 1, 2016. Fast and furious. Fast and furious. Once again the NDP are rushing legislation. We know that any appointments made to TEBA may be highly political and divisive. I would like to know who will be making these appointments. Will this association become another place where NDP government just pushes through their agenda?

We know that this type of situation could lead to, possibly, serious outcomes as government maintains that they should have a formal seat at the bargaining table as 90 per cent of education funding comes from the government. We now ask the government to slow down. Slow down. Speeding up the process, your process, will only cause concern and can be considered undemocratic, which you've heard consistently throughout the opposition.

We know that most boards will not even have the time to meet before this bill is passed, and this just isn't fair. The fact is that we're putting through a bill at a time when there are going to be holidays. It could be that maybe some of these boards don't even meet until January, until after this bill comes into effect. The school boards are asking that you please slow down. A three-minute conference call with the minister is not enough time, and it is the only time they have had since the bill has been tabled.

Wildrose is committed to consulting with our boards, which you've just heard from my colleague just in front of me here. We have written our schools, we have e-mailed our schools, and we've called our schools on the phone. Now, that's consultation. That's actually going out and hearing what they have to say. You actually are hearing letters that were written since Thursday to MLAs because they care. I can only assume that the members across are getting the same letters that we're getting. The fact is that these letters that are coming in are all saying the same thing: there was no consultation; too fast; slow down. Slow down.

This is exactly what we're seeing with the farmers. This is exactly what we're seeing with the rest of the bills that are being pushed through this House. The fact is that we're moving too fast through these. Many of these bills have billions of dollars of spending. They do not have the scrutiny they need.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that the NDP government please slow down the process and hold consultations with them and then go to committee with this so that in committee we can solve a lot of the issues that are coming forward before they become issues, instead of regulating it after the fact.

In the end I'm here to ask everybody in this Assembly to please vote for this amendment. This amendment is important. It is time we start seeing some bills go to committee, which we have not been seeing other than my colleague's bill, Bill 202. Bill 202 was to promote democracy in Alberta.

An Hon. Member: Bill 202 is the local food.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. I've been corrected. Bill 204? [interjection] Thank you. Bill 203. Apparently, I need education on the names of the bills. It is hard to keep up with the bills because we are not doing the appropriate consultation that it takes to get them through the House.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, I urge and ask everybody in this House to please vote for this amendment. Thank you.

5:20

The Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake?

Are there other members who would like to speak to amendment R1? The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Respectfully, on the amendment, I mean, certainly, I can appreciate many of the comments here. You know, it's very important – and I know that perhaps there's someone trying to do this. It's not going to work – right? – because I have the evidence that we did lots and lots of interaction on this bill. Don't try to presume that we didn't do consultation. If you do so, that's at your own peril. You're only as good as your credibility if you're actually speaking the truth, right? So don't go too far there.

I'm just saying that people have other reasons to say: well, just give us more time and so forth. On December 31 the whole idea of having some provincial bargaining is gone. So if you want to push it on, then that's what's going to happen as a result.

Respectfully, I don't support this amendment because I would like to get this job done and make sure that we are in fact negotiating both in good faith and to make sure that we keep a close eye on our public finances. This is a public contract. It's the first contract for public workers. That will set a precedent for all the other negotiations. It's very important that we have the wages negotiated at a table where the funder is there. Just try to think of that, okay? Please.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, were you speaking under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Eggen: That was on the amendment.

The Speaker: On the amendment.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, it was. Thank you.

The Speaker: My apologies. Any under 29(2)(a) for the Minister of Education?

Are there any other members who would like to speak to amendment R1?

Hearing none, the question is called for amendment R1, which is an amendment to Bill 8, Public Education Collective Bargaining Act.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment R1 lost]

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

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Schneider
Clark	Hunter	Smith
Cooper	MacIntyre	Starke
Cyr	McIver	Stier
Drysdale	Orr	van Dijken
Ellis	Pitt	Yao
Fraser	Rodney	

5:40

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Ganley	McKitrick
Babcock	Goehring	McLean
Bilous	Hinkley	McPherson
Carson	Hoffman	Miller
Ceci	Horne	Nielsen
Connolly	Jabbour	Phillips
Coolahan	Jansen	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Kazim	Rosendahl
Dach	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Dang	Littlewood	Schmidt
Drever	Loyola	Sucha
Eggen	Malkinson	Sweet
Feehan	Mason	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Woollard

Totals:	For – 20	Against – 42
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[Motion on amendment R1 lost]

The Speaker: We are now back to debate on the main motion.

Are you speaking to the main motion now? Is that correct?

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request unanimous consent from the House for one-minute bells for the remainder of the evening.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Is there anyone else who would like to speak to the main motion?

Hearing none, bringing closure, the hon. Minister of Education. Is that correct?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. That's right, Mr. Speaker. I mean, this has been a very interesting process, certainly. Everyone should just take a step back and see it for what it is. We have a bill before us that we are debating, and we have a bill before us that has certain things that we all need to learn about, okay? Those are very important aspects of the legislative process that we're passing through here in second reading. Everyone can be edified on this and learn more about it, and over the next while we will have a chance to decide whether or not you think it's something that you can vote on or not. That's the way it works.

Certainly, just to try to summarize some of the concerns and things that people have spoken about in second reading here, first of all, in regard to the consultations that did take place in July and August and September and October, all 61 school boards were

consulted as well as the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Association of School Business Officials of Alberta, the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta, and the College of Alberta School Superintendents, in September and October of this year. Then, of course, as I said, I went and visited all of the 61 school boards as another layer of consultation.

Now, with my department – and I'll table this tomorrow, Mr. Speaker – this was the agenda that we used for those department consultations. Discussion item 1 was province-wide two-tiered bargaining; discussion item 2, establishing employer bargaining associations; discussion item 3, level of government involvement and employer representation, which would be the school boards; item 4, dispute resolution process; and item 5, general discussion. I know that people perhaps are not seeing exactly the outcome that they might have wanted, but certainly this was the process that we did follow in complete good faith, quite exhaustive as well, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to that, over the next three days we do have the Edmonton International Airport Holiday Inn tomorrow between 1 and 4 p.m., the Calgary Clarion Hotel and Conference Centre on Thursday from 9 a.m., and then the Fantasyland Hotel on Friday at 10 a.m. Certainly, people can either be phoning in or they can actually attend these further consultations as they wish. I invite all MLAs to come to be part of that as well. It could be quite an edifying experience as well.

Again, I can't emphasize enough how important it is for everyone to understand where we're at with those consultations over these last six months and then moving to December 31, which is the deadline by which a number of school boards can start their own local bargaining process. So even if you thought, "Hey, maybe I could go for this table way of negotiating wages," that window could easily close by January 1 because people start negotiating. This is a pattern. I'm just basing this on a historical pattern over the last 15 or 20 years where certain individual local school boards would jump the gun and start the process and then create that whipsaw effect, Mr. Speaker, that I described before, where perhaps they think, "Oh, we'll go for a big contract because we want to keep our teachers happy," and then we end up with something that we can't afford.

Mr. Speaker, at the crossroads of this very important legislation is for us to make sure that we have a fair bargaining process for teachers but also that we are taking direct responsibility for the scarce public funds that we have available to us as a government. We all know what the circumstances are. We debate it every day. We, you know, indulge in hyperbole about it and so forth, but the reality is the reality. It's that the wages of our public service, not just teachers but the whole public service, are a very considerable part of our overall budget. The funder needs to be at the table to execute a proper negotiation of these things in a reasonable manner. If we're not there, we've seen a long history where negotiations have gone south or sideways and we end up paying a whole awful lot more than we can afford. We've never been in a circumstance where we have to be considering this in a very, very serious and sober manner.

Just be reminded. Don't get lost in, you know, the weeds of talking about consultation and trying to tie it to other things and no consultation and so forth and so on. The stakes behind this one in regard to collective bargaining with two tables are very, very high in regard to the future of funding and solvency of how we conduct this government. So please, everyone, consider that in the best way possible but in the most sober way possible as well if you can.

5:50

Certainly, in the many interactions that I have with school boards – and I will continue to do so, Mr. Speaker – and with the teachers and the public in general, too, I'm always looking for a way to find collaboration and to find consensus. Never has it been more important than with this particular piece of legislation – right? – because it's involving a lot of money, not just teachers' wages but, as I say, a precedent for the public service in general. So let's all remember that, please.

Also, it's important to read the bill and, if you need any further explanation, to get further technical briefing and/or explanations from myself, from my ministry staff, and so forth to see exactly what this is. This is, Mr. Speaker, a mechanism for how we conduct ourselves through bargaining. It's not what we are bargaining. If you can get that distinction through – it took me a while to figure that out, too, quite frankly, but once I got it, we know that we use fair, equitable processes of collective bargaining every step along the way to, one, establish the teachers' employer board association as a statutory corporation that has a representative assembly from all the school boards; 61 school boards vote for who goes on that board association. We will be at the table as well in the TEBA so that we have the funder there directly negotiating whatever comes to that table. Now, what is decided to go to that table, again, is decided and negotiated between the Teachers' Association now and then the employer board, which is the school boards and ourselves. Again, we use proper negotiating, which could involve arbitration, as to what goes to the main table for wages and what goes to the local table.

I know that school boards – and I sympathize because this has been a long process since 1993, I think, or before, when they lost their powers for taxation, right? But this is a way to make sure that

further erosion of school board power along the way is at least stopped somehow because then you have the table that you can negotiate local conditions. That could be quite substantial. I mean, please don't think that this is just going to somehow bring all the wages up to one place. You have different wage levels at different places around the province with each of the school boards. I mean, that doesn't change. Things move up and down, but the regional variation doesn't change.

Also, there are many substantial things that can be negotiated that are inherently local in nature: northern living allowances, certain accommodation for substitute teaching in different places, other individual conditions that can be quite substantial and involve the local school board as well. The Alberta School Boards Association helps local boards along the way to engage in those negotiations, and that's very important as well. Certainly, we're not excluding. We are trying to make it clear how this process takes place and trying to make sure that we have fair negotiations and we keep a close eye on the public purse, Mr. Speaker, because that is a very important job that I cannot compromise.

So based on that, Mr. Speaker, I hope that people might consider this bill and help to support it. You will all feel better for it as well. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've had a good debate, made good progress, and I believe that we should adjourn until 7:30 tonight. Thank you.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:55 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Statement by the Speaker	
Magna Carta	705
Introduction of Guests	705
Members' Statements	
World AIDS Day	707
Government Policies	714
Family Farms	715, 716
Alberta Bottle Depot Association	715
Climate Change Strategy	715
Oral Question Period	
Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation	707
Royalty Review	708
Provincial Quarterly Fiscal Update	708
Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation	709, 710
Violence against Women and Girls	709
International Trade	710
Climate Change Strategy and First Nations	711
Public School Boards' Association of Alberta	711
Government Policies	712
Calgary Southwest Ring Road	712
Aboriginal Workforce Participation	713
Sheep River Nurse Practitioners Clinic	713
Climate Change Strategy	714
Tabling Returns and Reports	716
Tablings to the Clerk	716
Orders of the Day	717
Government Motions	
Adjournment of Fall Session	717
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 8 Public Education Collective Bargaining Act	717
Division	733

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